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The Man from Texas;

OR,

The Outlaws of Arkansas.

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NEW YORK SHARP," "OVERLAND KIT,"
"ROCKY MOUNTAIN ROB," "KEN-
TUCK, THE SPORT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

MISSOURI C. SMITH.

"BANK full and rising."

A broad and mighty river now, the yellow Arkansas, lashing the crumbling banks with its restless, surging waves, and every now and then cutting off a slice of earth and carrying it onward toward the sea, entombed in its mighty bosom.

Smithville Landing—six o'clock on an April morning, and a horse and rider come galloping down to the river.

A noble pair that horse and rider.

The horse, a cream-colored mustang, curiously flecked with patches of black; the rider, a young and beautiful girl who sat on the steed like a very prairie queen.

She was tall in stature, straight and slender, yet supple and willowy in her build; her face, superbly beautiful, the features clearly cut, and

perfect in their outlines; the complexion rich in its olive, sun-warmed tint; the skin so thin that the warm blood could be clearly discerned beneath. Her jet black hair—fine as finest silk, and so luxuriant in its growth, that, loose, it descended to her waist—was brushed carelessly back from her forehead, and gathered in a single knot behind, fastened by a little golden dagger. Her eyes, black as the hair, were large, full and brilliant—eyes that could melt into liquid softness when her heart was moved to pleasure, or could flash with angry fires when passion heat swelled within her veins. The low,

yet broad forehead, the little rose-bud like mouth, with its full, dewy lips and pearly white teeth; the proud, imperious chin—all were matchless.

No Eastern monarch, with senses charmed by the subtle drugs, and imagination roused by the strange, mystic perfumes of "Farther Ind," dreaming of the paradise to come beyond the tomb, ever saw a sweeter face than that of the Arkansas girl, Missouri C. Smith, sole child of General Leonidas Washington Smith, direct and only descendant of "the Smith" who, a hundred years before, founded Smithville, on



the Arkansas, a mile or so above the outlet of the sluggish creek, known as Catfish Bayou.

The girl was attired in a dark-green riding-habit, and on her head she wore a black velvet hat, from which a little white plume curled down, nestling against the silken hair.

At the levee she turned to the left and cantered off down the river road.

In just about a minute she left the metropolis of Smithville behind; it was not as large as Memphis or even Fort Smith.

Down by the plantations, past the magnolia trees, with their dark-green wax-like leaves and white blossoms, so rich in sweet incense, and in among the tall clumps of cottonwood, which announced the neighborhood of Catfish Bayou, she rode, and at last halted on the little point of land between the two streams.

Usually there was quite a difference between the yellow current of the Arkansas on one side, and the black waters of the Bayou on the other; but now the back water of the river had forced its way up the mouth of the creek, completely swallowing the current of the Catfish, and extinguishing it.

On the very extremity of the point of land was a huge cottonwood tree, which had been struck and killed by lightning.

Generally it was some ten or fifteen feet from the tree to the water, but now the turbid tide washed within a foot of the tree-trunk.

As the girl sat in the saddle and gazed out upon the surface of the water rushing so steadily onward, and splashing up against the shelving banks with many a hoarse and menacing sound, she felt a strong impulse to dismount, and, from the base of the blasted cottonwood, watch the splash and ripple of the surging tide, which was hurrying onward toward its doom like a living, guilty thing.

Down from the saddle, light as a bird, the girl dismounted. No need to fasten the rein of the mustang. Mustard was too well-bred to move from the spot where his mistress had left him.

Gathering up the long skirt of her riding-dress in her hand, with light, springy steps, that told of perfect health, and of every muscle in true play, the girl proceeded to the very extremity of the point of land, where on either side the angry waters seemed to threaten the lonely tree.

Leaning against the cottonwood, which inclined over the stream, Missouri, with a careless motion, dipped the lash of her little riding-whip into the river, and whisked the glistening drops here and there in the sunlight, like a score of polished diamonds.

And as the girl leaned against the tree-trunk, idly lashing the surface of the water, and watching the glittering drops as they went swiftly through the air, and then sought again the parent stream, old-time memories came back to her. Few minds, watching the mad current of a great river, rushing restlessly on, or the surf of old ocean beating in on the rocks, or beach, with its restless waves, but will give way to sad reflections.

And before the face of the girl, Missouri, rose the image of the handsome young Southern officer, who had won her girlish heart, put the gage of love, the betrothal ring, upon her finger; and then, a month afterward, had fallen by a revolver-shot fired by one of Merrell's Light-Horse, when the Yankee General, Steele, rode into Little Rock, after the skirmish at Bayou Fouché.

About five years had passed since that had happened; the war had ended, and she had even danced with one of the Union officers. And now, as she gazed listlessly upon the yellow waters, she reflected how greatly she had changed in a few short years. Only fifteen at the time of her lover's death, she had thought life had lost all its charms, and nightly went to sleep praying that she might die, and thus meet her betrothed beyond the tomb. But death does not come for wishing, and as year succeeded year, and the girl ripened into womanhood, little by little she forgot the grief, and the memory of her early love faded slowly away.

And now, as she gazed vacantly down upon the turbid waters, she caught herself wondering if she should have been happy had her lover lived, and if she would really have married him if the Yankee bullet had not so suddenly cut short his life.

And then a frown came over her handsome face as she lashed the skirt of her habit impatiently with the whip, and strove to banish the ugly thoughts from her mind, and to still remain leal and true to the memory of the dead love.

Pressing her hand against her brows, she half closed her eyes, and leaned heavily against the trunk of the blasted tree.

For full five minutes she remained motionless, striving, but in vain, to recall the old-time memories, and to banish the thoughts which whispered that possibly in the future she would meet a man whom she would like ten times better than the old love.

Angry at the thought, she started, and resting her hand against the tree, prepared to return to the mustang, who was lazily cropping the fresh young spring grass, some fifty paces off.

But the spirits of the yellow flood had marked the fair young girl for their prey, and, while she had been meditating with half-shut eyes, by the tree-trunk, the sapping current of the river had cut a channel beneath the bank under her feet, and as she turned to go, the weight of her tread, light as it was, completed the work.

She felt a sudden tremulous motion beneath her feet. She comprehended the danger, and strove to flee.

Too late.

Ten feet of solid earth, the entire extremity of the point bearing the blasted cottonwood and the fresh young girl on its surface, slid into the river.

Around the slight figure of the girl, and the tossing trunk of the old tree, foamed the yellow waters. The solid earth, which had but a moment before sustained the two, had melted into nothing within the embrace of the flood, as though touched by the wand of an enchanter.

Sucked under by the treacherous current of the Arkansas the girl for a moment disappeared beneath the wave. But Missouri had rare presence of mind, and knew enough when the turbid water blinded her eyes to keep her mouth shut, and to strike out vigorously with both hands and feet.

In a second, although it seemed five minutes at least to her, she rose again to the surface. The tree-trunk floating serenely on the bosom of the flood, was only some five feet from her. With a desperate effort she managed to paddle her way to, and clutch a branch of the tree, within a foot of the trunk.

"If I ever get out, I'll learn to swim!" the girl exclaimed, as she sputtered the water out of her mouth.

The envious wave had loosened the fastenings of her hair, and the coal-black locks were streaming down wildly over her shoulders, and floating on the surface of the turbid river, that idly tossed them up and down, caressing the silken hair with many a little wavelet.

Down the Arkansas, past Catfish Bayou, borne on the surface of the rushing tide, went the cottonwood and the girl clinging to it.

Three or four times Missouri had attempted to climb up on the tree, and each time the trunk had rolled over, yielding to her weight, and ducked her over head and ears in the water.

Finally giving up the attempt, she contented herself with simply clinging to the log, trusting that, by some eddy in the current, the tree-trunk would be carried in to the bank, and thus afford her a chance to escape.

Just below where the bayou came into the Arkansas the river made a sharp turn to the left, and Missouri, who knew the river for ten miles up and down from Smithville as well as any pilot, hoped that, once past the bend, the current would carry her and her huge life-preserver in near to the shore.

Around the point swept the tree and its living burden, and, as Missouri had expected, she came nearer to the bank, but was yet some twenty feet from it. To leave the tree, then, and attempt to gain the shore, would only result in her finding a grave beneath the yellow wave.

"Oh, dear!" cried the girl, disconsolately, "it's three miles to the Ozark place, and I shall die before I get down there, I know."

But, hardly had the words left her lips, when sharp on the fresh morning air rung the hoof-strokes of a horse, apparently coming up the river road.

A cry of joy came from Missouri's lips as, with eager ears, she caught the sound; and soon a horseman emerged from a clump of trees which masked the road beyond.

Just a single glance, and the face and figure of the stranger were photographed forever on the maiden's memory. He was within a hundred feet of her, and had reined in his horse so abruptly at sight of the girl that the animal was forced back almost upon his haunches, with his head forced up in the air by the cruel pressure of the heavy Mexican bit, just as if the horse and rider were "posing" for the purpose of affording some rising young backwoods artist a model for an equestrian statue, to be done in marble at the expense of a grateful republic, which lets its heroes starve while living, and then gives them a magnificent burial and a statue when dead.

And Missouri, a true American girl, first thought what a splendid-looking fellow the stranger was, and then what a decided disadvantage she labored under at that moment in regard to her personal appearance!

The rider was a tall, handsome young fellow, broad-shouldered and muscular in build, and yet not clumsily "put together," but extremely well proportioned. His face was the long oval, Italian-like one, so common to the men of the South-west; cheek-bones as high as an Indian's, sallow complexion, thin mustache and "goatee," of a sandy yellow, as was also the long hair which came down over his ears, "clubbed" in true South-western style. His eyes, dark-brown in color, possessed the remarkable property of appearing to be jet-black, a dozen paces off. The stranger was oddly attired in a "blanket-coat" made of a red army blanket, the black stripes of which had been so arranged in the cutting of the garment that they served as an ornament to the skirts; a pair of butternut-colored pantaloons—evidently of homespun stuff—tucked into a pair of high riding-boots; a white shirt, the linen bosom of which was curiously frilled and ruffled; and over his brows a broad-brimmed black felt hat—of the Mexican sombrero pattern—was pulled. A leather belt girded his waist, and as the wind swayed back the folds of the coat-skirts, the butts of a pair of revolvers, navy-size, and the silver-mounted hilt of a twelve-inch bowie, were plainly visible.

Just a single glance at the solitary horseman, and Missouri felt convinced that she should never forget the appearance of the young stranger, so utterly unlike any one that she had ever seen.

Already, in imagination, the stranger's strong arm had rescued her from the yellow flood; and for such a service there could be but one recompense—herself!

In just about two seconds, Missouri, proud, high-spirited Southern girl as she was, came to the deliberate conclusion that the horseman was the most noble-looking man she had ever seen, and that, for the first time in her life, she really was in love, and that the early passion which had seemed to her to be so strong and lasting was but a girlish fancy.

But, amid all these conflicting thoughts, she could not help thinking what a disgraceful appearance she would present when she got out of the water, and the thought came to her that the stranger would not think she was pretty, with her hair hanging down, all wet and tangled around her neck, and her clothing clinging to her, drowned-rat fashion.

Just a second the horseman gazed in astonishment; then he dismounted, came to the edge of the bank, and looked up the stream toward the girl.

"Save me!" exclaimed Missouri, as she floated on, coming nearer and nearer to where the stranger stood. As she spoke she had involuntarily striven to lift herself out of the water, and the consequence was that the tree-trunk rolled over and soused her under the treacherous element, from which, after a moment, she emerged, sputtering like a very mermaid.

When she had fairly got the water out of her eyes, and glanced at the shore, to her utter horror and rage she detected a broad grin on the face of the stranger. The ducking she had so abruptly received had struck him as being funny!

"The big brute!" Between the little white teeth, clenched firmly together, came the expression, and in one little instant her opinion of the horseman changed, and in her mind came the wild wish that he would mount his ugly, claybank steed and gallop on, leaving her to her fate.

"Look out—catch!"

Despite her indignation, Missouri could not refrain from looking again at the stranger, at the warning command. The horseman had taken a leather cord, which had been hanging on the horn of his saddle, and as she turned her head toward him he whirled a coil of it through the air, retaining one end of the line in his hand. The girl recognized the Mexican lasso at once, although it was the first time that she had ever seen the world-renowned weapon.

Thrown with the skill which long practice on the plains of Texas had given to the horseman, the loop of the lasso came coiling down around the maiden's neck.

"Can you hold on with your hands while I pull you to shore?" he asked, speaking as coolly as though it was the life of a pig that was at stake rather than that of a human being.

"Yes." There was something in the tone of her voice and in the expression of her face which made the stranger smile again; and Missouri, with one hand in the loop of the

lasso, which she had removed from her neck, and the other still clutching the tree-trunk, felt half tempted, as she saw that smile, to drop the leather cord and trust to the log to sustain her until some one else should come to her rescue. But, beginning to feel chilled by remaining so long in the water, she swallowed her resentment, and quitting her hold of the cottonwood, she grasped the leather cord with both hands, while the stranger drew her, not over-gently, to the bank, and then pulled her out on dry land once more.

Out of breath from her rapid transit through the yellow flood, Missouri was unable to stand, and was per force obliged to accept the proffered support of the horseman's arm.

But as her breath and strength came slowly back to her, and she withdrew herself from the stranger's embrace with the air of a tragedy queen, the unfeeling horseman completely spoiled all the romance by observing tersely that she looked like a drowned rat.

Missouri was just preparing to thank the man for his timely service, but after such a remark she felt that words of thanks would have choked her.

"Quite a bad situation for you, marm," the horseman added, as the girl turned half-away from him, wringing the water out of the tangled masses of the superb hair.

This was adding insult to injury; and the girl mentally observed to herself that the man must be a natural born idiot not to perceive at a glance that she was a "miss" and not a "marm."

Then the stranger, with his honest, big brown eyes, looked curiously at the girl. The wet garments, clinging tight to her, betrayed the rounded perfections of her well-nigh perfect form, and Missouri, happening to turn her head as she coiled the hair up in a knot as it had been before and plunged the golden dagger through it, caught the stranger's glance of admiration. The hot blood rushed into her face, and she blushed from the roots of the coal-black hair that fringed her forehead clear down to the back of her neck.

And the stranger, on his part, finding himself detected, colored up guiltily, and, turning away, hid his confusion by adjusting the lasso again on the horn of the saddle.

"The fellow has some sense," muttered the girl, as she stooped down and wrung the water out of the skirt of her dress.

When she rose to her feet, the stranger was standing by his horse, with his arm resting on the saddle, and regarding her with a stolid face.

Missouri had now come to the conclusion that she ought to smother her dislike for the fellow and thank him for his timely aid, although it was difficult to do so in a proper manner, so strangely had the horseman irritated her by his off-hand, careless manner.

"I am very much obliged to you, sir, for the service you have done me," she said.

The words were well enough, but even she herself was conscious that there was a stiffness and a formality about her manner that suited but ill with the sentiment of gratitude which she should feel to the man who had possibly saved her life.

"Don't speak of it, marm!" the horseman exclaimed, in his careless way, that was so extremely offensive to the girl. "I kinder hesitated for a moment because I hadn't been introduced to you, and I thought maybe that you would object to a fellow's scraping acquaintance with you in such an extremely unceremonious way."

Missouri, not lacking in discernment, with all her pride and haughtiness, instantly came to the conclusion that the stranger was laughing at her in a quiet way and the thought nettled her.

"I'm sorry that you didn't wait, then, and follow me down the bank until you came across some one who could have introduced us," she rejoined, quickly, a smile on her face that intimated she was paying the stranger back in his own coin.

The horseman laughed but replied not. He was evidently pleased with the retort.

"And that your mind may be easy, I'll introduce myself to you at once," she continued. "My name is Missouri C. Smith, and I am the daughter of General L. W. Smith."

"General Leonidas Smith, who was colonel of the Tenth Arkansas at Pea Ridge?" the stranger asked, evidently astonished.

"Yes, sir," Missouri replied; "and now may I have the honor of knowing the name of the gentleman to whom I am indebted for my life?"

It was a simple but very natural question under the circumstances, and yet the brow of the stranger clouded up and he was evidently perplexed.

The girl noticed his embarrassment in amazement.

"Why, Miss," he said, slowly—he had dropped the "marm," much to the girl's relief—"I don't see why you should care to know who I am."

"Only a simple wish to know the name of the man to whom I owe my life," she replied, "and I am sure that you will not refuse such a small request."

"You might call me the man from Texas," he said, with a laugh; "that would cover the ground, you know, for that's where I come from."

"I couldn't very well introduce you to my father by such a name as that," she remarked, and as she spoke she looked him full in the face with her big black eyes, as if seeking to read there the reason why he was reluctant to give his name.

"Of course, Miss, I was only joking," he said, avoiding her glance; "there's no reason why I shouldn't give my name. It's Francis Winnie."

"Any relation to Lieutenant Winnie, of the United States army?" the girl asked, quickly, and evidently not a little astonished.

Again the man seemed confused, but after a moment replied that he did not think that he was a relative of that officer.

"I know the lieutenant; he's in Smithville," she said.

"Is he?" the man said, absently, and then, after a moment, continued: "If you are General Smith's daughter, perhaps you can tell me whether he's got an overseer yet on his place."

"No, sir," the girl answered.

"Well, I'm glad of that!" he said, "because I've come on purpose to apply for the place; and I hope, Miss, that you'll put in a good word for me."

"My father is not at home at present," she answered; "he is at Little Rock, but will come on the first boat."

Then the handsome fellow who had saved her life was only an overseer? The keen eyes of The-Man-from-Texas detected the instant change in her manner, and he shrewdly guessed the cause.

"Be up on the first boat, eh?" he observed, thoughtfully; "well, I suppose I can wait. Would you be so good, Miss, as to tell me where I would be apt to find accommodation until your father comes? I ain't particular, you know—any sort of a roosting-place will do."

Missouri, accustomed though she was to hearing the rude phrases of the border, felt that her sensibilities were terribly outraged by the free and careless speech of the handsome horseman, and in her own mind set him down at once as being the greatest boor she had ever seen. But for the unfortunate termination of the stranger's speech she would instantly have replied that the door of her father's mansion always stood open to receive the stranger guest, and that the General, her father, would have regarded it as an insult if any stranger should pass his house without partaking of his hospitality; but now, for the first time in her life, she felt a reluctance to tender the courtesy of a welcome beneath her father's roof-tree. And if she had been called upon to give her reasons for the dislike to the man who really had a great claim upon her gratitude, she could only have defended her conduct by saying that the horseman didn't "speak nice."

After hesitating for a moment, she replied that perhaps he could get accommodations at the Adair Place, up the bayou.

"Who is this Mister Adair?" the horseman asked; "not one of your grand folks, I hope. I don't like these folks that put on style. I'm a right plain man, myself, you see."

Missouri began to think the man was doing every thing in his power to make her hate him, and with an effort she restrained the impulse to tell him that he was *very plain*, indeed; but, conquering herself, she replied, simply:

"Mr. Adair has only a little place, about twenty acres, and is more hunter than planter; all the folks about here call him Swapping Gol. His first name is Goliah, and they say that he would rather trade by swapping than eat. So you may guess what sort of a person he is."

"He's the man for my money!" exclaimed the stranger, abruptly. "Now, Miss, if you just direct me to his house, I'll take it real kindly."

"With pleasure, sir. It's about half a mile up the bayou from where the road crosses. The ferry is on his place."

"Now, Miss, if you'll just mount my horse, I'll be happy to lend the critter to you to carry you home."

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," Missouri said, with stately

courtesy, "but my own horse is just on the other side of the bayou, where the bank caved in with me."

"Better get on and ride to him then, Miss; that is if you can ride on my saddle."

"I never saw saddle yet that I couldn't ride on!" replied the girl, quickly, her dark eyes flashing.

"Well, Miss, I reckon now you're a tearer!" the horseman said, with a sober face, but there was a twinkle in his eyes which betrayed suppressed merriment.

Missouri was extremely annoyed at the coarse remark, and quietly proceeded to get on the stranger's horse without replying.

In the saddle she spoke:

"I'll show you the way, sir," and giving the mustang his head, she proceeded onward while the stranger followed behind, his face lit up with a smile and the look in his eyes plainly revealing how much he admired the girl who sat in the saddle sideways, and rode the "clay-bank" with an ease and grace that a Comanche warrior or a circus queen would have envied.

The road bent abruptly to the right on coming near the bayou, and followed the stream up about half a mile; then, taking advantage of a hollow in the bank, swooped down to the bayou and ascended again on the other side.

A rude scow, large enough to support a good-sized wagon, with a rope attached to each end, and two long poles lying in it, served as a means to cross the stream. This was the ferry.

On a scrub oak to which one of the ropes was attached, was a rudely-painted sign, which read:

"CATFISH FERRY.

"25 cents. Put the money in the knot-hole underneath.

"GOL ADAIR."

"The knot-hole underneath," referred to by the sign, was a small cavity in the tree-trunk about as big as a man's fist. The interior of the trunk evidently was hollow.

The horseman read the sign and looked astonished.

"Well, this beats me!" he exclaimed; "how does the man get the money out of the tree?"

"He has a pet squirrel," explained the girl, "that has been taught to go after it. He only has six or seven crossing the ferry a week, and he says it's worth more than it brings to look after the ferry, so he arranged his 'bank'—the tree is his bank—and now the ferry takes care of itself."

The horseman deposited a silver quarter in Gol Adair's "bank," and then poled himself, the girl and the horse over the stream, which was only fifty feet wide.

"We have solid stuff down in Texas," he said, referring to the silver; "we don't take much stock in rags."

On the other side of the stream, the girl pointed to a little path leading through a tangled mass of blackberry bushes to the thicket which fringed both sides of the bayou above the ferry.

"That path leads to Mr. Adair's cabin," she said; "it is only a hundred yards or so through the bush and then you'll come to his clearing."

Then the girl jumped lightly down from the horse.

"If your horse is down at the point, suppose you wait here, Miss, while I go and catch him for you," suggested her escort, and then, without waiting for reply, he leaped into the saddle and dashed off at a rate of speed which caused the girl to look after him with admiring eyes.

Seating herself upon a fallen tree, she tried to analyze her feelings toward this certainly very handsome stranger.

"I hate him one minute and I admire him the next!" she reflected, petulantly. "I really think the fellow has bewitched me! I'm sure that I shan't say any thing in his favor to father, although I suppose of course that I shall have to tell how he saved me from a lingering death. I wish it had been Gol Adair or even Will Fayette; I hate to feel under an obligation to this unknown man. He's impudent enough for any thing, and I really believe he makes those coarse remarks just to annoy me. To be sure, nearly all the men round here talk the same way, but somehow, the ugly slang never seemed to grate on my ears until now. Oh, dear! I wish he'd go away. I can't bear the thought of his being father's overseer."

And by the time that Missouri had reached this point in her reflections, The-Man-from-Texas was back, leading the spotted mustang, Mustard, by the bridle.

"It's a pretty beast, Miss," he said, as he dismounted, and offered his shoulder to assist the girl to mount; but she pretended not to perceive his intentions, and, despite her long skirt, wet and heavy as it was, leaped into the saddle.

And then, as she tightened the reins in her hand, she turned her head and looked the horseman full in the face for a moment, with a very sober expression on her features.

"Mr. Winnie"—she began.

"That ain't my name!" he exclaimed, abruptly; "I was only joking. My name is Texas—Francis Texas."

"Well, Mr. Texas then," Missouri continued, never apparently heeding the fact that he had given a false name, "you have placed me under a deep obligation, and—and I don't like to be in debt to any one. Can't I pay you in some way so that I can feel free again?"

The-Man-from-Texas looked her straight in the eyes for a moment, and he too looked quite sober, almost sad. Missouri never flinched from his gaze.

"Yes, you can pay me," he said; "bend down your head."

She obeyed instantly, and he, standing close by the side of the mustang, passed his arm around her neck as if to whisper in her ear, and then, with a sudden movement, pressed a long, passionate kiss upon the full red lips of the girl.

Her face flushed crimson, and as he released her she swayed back unsteadily to her former position in the saddle. Her features trembled convulsively, and she pressed her hand upon her heart as though stricken by a sudden pain. A long, deep breath came from between the parted lips and the brilliant black eyes were suffused with tears.

"There, you have paid yourself, and we are even now," she said, in a low and faltering voice, while her bosom rose and fell like the swelling billows of old ocean. "Remember, I do not owe you any thing now."

A single pull at the rein and Mustard went dashing up the road at headlong speed.

CHAPTER II.

BLACK-JACK SWAMP.

CATFISH Bayou was only some five miles in length, and took its rise in an enormous swamp covering a thousand acres or more. Huge brakes of cane, gigantic cypress trees, the roots covered by the black and almost stagnant water, tall, straight "gums," high sycamores and the tangled "underbrush" of low-growing shrubs, interlaced with creeping vines, formed the interior of the swamp. It was generally known as Black-Jack Swamp, so named for the number of black-jack trees that grew on its edges. In the center of the wilderness was quite a large lagoon; black and ink-like were its waters. Two or three small islands, fifty to a hundred feet from the shores, were in the center of the lagoon. The islands were barely a foot above the surface of the water, and were but little more than a mass of tangled vegetation, except the largest one, from the center of which rose a clump of huge cypress trees. The edge of this island was fringed by a heavy growth of cane, apparently almost stout enough to form a barrier to a bear.

Few birds or beasts sought Black-Jack Swamp for a refuge. Once in a while, a stray bear would take up his home amid the cane, but the wily 'possum and barred coon were constant inhabitants of the tall gum trees which grew on the borders of the great slough.

The negroes in their midnight hunts often roamed through the borders of the "slash," but rarely attempted to penetrate into it as far as the borders of the lagoon. The dull and gloomy waters, overshadowed by the giant branches of the cypress, struck awe even to the cheerful souls of the blacks; and then, too, superstition had been at work and had peopled the interior of the swamp with hobgoblins and ghosts too frightful to mention.

It was about five miles from the edge of the swamp to Smithville landing. It was all a low prairie until within about a mile of the Arkansas, where it met the ridge which formed the bank of the river. This prairie was covered with a coarse, rank grass, with here and there a fringe of blackberry bushes, encircling a clump of scroggy timber.

Just as the sun commenced to sink in the west, on the afternoon of the day when Missouri had met the stranger as detailed in our last chapter, a young man, with a double-barreled shot-gun carried in the hollow of his arm, was crossing the prairie and proceeding directly toward the swamp.

He was apparently about twenty-six or seven years old, of medium size, round face, smoothly shaven, florid com-

plexion, reddish-brown hair, blue eyes, rather small, and shifting and uncertain in their gaze. He was neatly dressed, in a dark-gray business suit, although he now wore a pair of high boots and had a broad-brimmed felt hat pulled down over his eyes.

He was called William Fayette, son of Robert Fayette, who, before the war, was one of the leading bankers in the State of Arkansas; but, having cast his fortunes with the South, he suffered thereby a loss of nearly all his property. The war ended, he had settled down on a plantation he had managed to retain, at Smithville; and, besides, had established a small banking business at the landing.

The son had neither followed his father south nor gone into the Southern army, but had contrived, in some mysterious way, to escape the rigid conscription and remain at home, apparently without taking sides with either party. It was rumored that young Fayette had really been concerned with the guerrilla band led by the famous partisan leader, Yell Ozark, and had acted as a secret agent for the South.

This, however, was but idle rumor, and when the authority of the United States had been re-established in Arkansas and the civil government reorganized, William Fayette gave in his adherence to the ruling party, and received in reward for his services the United States assessorship of the district.

The knowing ones shook their heads and intimated their belief that Bill Fayette knew which side his bread was buttered on; and as his father (who was a strong "Southern-rights man" still) and himself were partners in the banking business, and lived in the same house, it was more than probable that father and son perfectly understood each other.

As Fayette entered the swamp, he cast a hasty glance behind him, as if to detect if a watch had been put upon him, but not a single living object was in sight.

Once inside the shadows of the trees, Fayette, who apparently was well acquainted with the way, as he went straight on without the least hesitation, struck into a little path leading, with many a winding turn, into the center of the "slash."

The way seemed like the path usually made by the alligators passing from one pool to another; but as it was too far north for those scaly monsters, it was probably a bear's track.

It was very apparent that Fayette was not in search of game, though he did carry a gun, for he went straight on, looking neither to the right nor left, until he halted on the edge of the lagoon, in the center of the swamp.

Putting a whistle to his lips, he blew a shrill blast upon it. Then he sat down on one of the roots of the huge cypress, which grew on the borders of the dark pool, and waited.

In a few minutes he heard a crashing amid the cane that surrounded the largest island in the center of the lagoon, as if a bear or some other heavy animal was striving to force a passage through; then the cane parted and a boat, rudely hollowed out of a single log—the "dug-out" of the Southwest—containing a solitary man, who wielded a light paddle with wonderful skill, came gliding over the surface of the ink-like water.

The man in the dug-out was small of stature, with a long, thin face, almost as sallow as dressed buck-skin; his eyes were small, gray-green in color, and sharp and piercing as the eyes of a wildcat, which, indeed, they resembled. He was dressed in a homespun suit, colored with the dye of the butternut; the coat was cut like a hunting-shirt and belted in at the waist. On his feet he wore a pair of Indian moccasins; an old yellow slouched hat was pulled down over his brows, and from under it escaped his long, yellow, tow-like hair, which grew thin and scraggy.

On his lap rested a heavy double-barreled shot-gun—a weapon which he was never seen without—and in the belt which girded his waist were thrust two large revolvers, silver-mounted, and a heavy bowie-knife, with a blade a foot long at least—a formidable instrument in the hands of a desperate man, in a close contest.

This little, insignificant, ugly fellow, who, armed as he was, was a regular walking arsenal, was no other than Yell Ozark, the once-notorious guerrilla chieftain and now the hunted outlaw.

Few men in Arkansas, or, indeed, in the whole Southwest, had given the Federal soldiers more trouble than Yell, during the late war.

The outlaw combined in his veins the blood of two of the best families in Arkansas—the Yells, who had settled Yell-

ville, on Crooked creek, in Marion county, and the Ozarks of the Arkansas bottom. At the beginning of the war he was running a small plantation on Mulberry creek, about fifteen miles from the Arkansas river, near Salt Spring—all that he had left of the handsome estate left him by his father, for Yell thought more of dogs, guns and horses than he did of corn and cotton. And when he took up arms, from his contempt of control and thorough knowledge of the country, he organized a guerrilla band which proved to be a very ugly thorn in the side of the Federal army and gave no rest to the mountain Union men of North-western Arkansas, against whom he manifested an especial hatred.

And when Kirby Smith's surrender terminated the war, west of the Mississippi, and Logan and Crockett, and a dozen other cavalry leaders of more or less importance, came into Little Rock and laid down their arms, Yell Ozark swore that he hadn't quit fighting yet, and he would be dog-goned if he'd surrender to any Yank as long as he had his double-barreled shot-gun, a handful of buckshot, or a charge of powder left. The others might quit the game if they liked; he'd fight the Government single-handed.

And Yell kept his word. No Federal officer received his surrender, and when the blue-coats came after him, he plunged into the pathless swamps and hid himself in the lair of the black bear and the moccasin-snake, until the troops departed, tired of chasing a man who knew every foot of the trackless wilderness as well as the wildcat and coon.

Yell, too, always seemed well advised of the movements of the soldiers, and it had been shrewdly whispered, by more than one of the inhabitants of Smithville, that some one in the secrets of the authorities must be on friendly terms with the hunted man.

Yell stepped from the boat to the shore. Fayette rose.

"Danger, Ozark," he said, briefly; "Lieutenant Winnie is here again."

CHAPTER III.

A TRAIL OF DEATH.

NIGHT had come; a sable wall had gathered around the log-cabin of Gol Adair, better known for fifty miles up and down the Arkansas as "Swapping Gol."

This cabin was rudely constructed of undressed logs, piled one on the other and so notched as to lock at the corners. The logs were "chinked" with clay, but here and there the filling had tumbled out and left great crevices.

The house was constructed in the usual plan common to the South-west; two separate apartments, with a broad passageway between them, and the roof, rudely thatched, covering the whole. The chimneys, curiously constructed out of slabs of wood and clay, were placed, one at each end, on the outside of the building.

Through the chinks between the logs, on the side of the house facing the creek, from which the action of the wind and rain had loosened the clay, the light of the huge fire, that blazed in the fireplace within, flared out on the darkness of the night.

The cabin stood by the edge of the clearing, and about a hundred yards from the bayou.

Gliding down on the sluggish bosom of the Catfish, came the dug-out of Yell Ozark, and in the dug-out were Will Fayette and the outlaw.

Softly and noiselessly as a phantom bark the dug-out came on; the outlaw handling the broad paddle so deftly that the splash of the water was not as loud as would have been made by the wing of the kingfisher skimming along the surface of the bayou.

"Thar's the clearing," Ozark said, in a cautious tone, as the rays of light, flashing through the chinks of the cabin wall, caught his eye.

"Put her to shore, then," Fayette said, using the same caution in his speech. "We must be careful and be ready to back out, for if Adair and his dogs are home, the hounds will smell us out in a minute."

"I reckon thar ain't much risk o' that," the outlaw replied, confidently; "but I kin send the dug-out cavortin' 'cross the drink with a single wipe of the paddle ef the dogs are about, and I reckon thar ain't many two-legged critters could see us ten foot off, 'less they had eyes like a cat, like mine, in this hyer darkness."

"Give a yowl like a wildcat—a low one. If the dogs are home that will start 'em," said Fayette, as the end of the

dug-out grated against one of the cypress knees stretching out under the water from the bank.

"Me-o-w!" Plaintively the call sounded on the night air.

So skillfully had the outlaw imitated the cry of the nocturnal marauder, that a fine, fat coon, who was descending the trunk of a large gum-tree, on the borders of the clearing, with intent to forage on the poultry-yard of the planter-hunter, no sooner heard the low cry, than he twisted himself round, scampered back, ascending to the very top of the gum, evidently in great alarm.

But the yelp of some watchful dog, followed by the chorus of the rest of the pack, eager for the prey, fell not upon the ears of the two men in the dug-out.

"As I expected, they're off, and the cabin is deserted," Fayette said, in a tone which betrayed a great deal of satisfaction. "Now then, my idea is just this: Lieutenant Winnie is here for no good to us. It was only by accident that I learned he was here at all. Old Uncle Snow saw him, and he told the old darkey that he had come down for a week's hunting with Gol Adair and Dutch Pete, but I have an idea that, under pretense of hunting, he is going to try and spy out the secret of our island retreat, and then bring the soldiers down on us."

"Why not let me lay in wait for him some day, and put a charge of buck-shot through his dog-goned head?" asked Ozark, fiercely.

"No, no!" cried Fayette, quickly; "that must not be. We should have the whole country about our ears. The first thing is to ascertain whether he is really here on a hunting expedition or not; that is what brought me down here to-night. I thought the chances were that we should find the cabin deserted; and if he has gone out for a hunt with Adair and Pete, we can go through his carpet-bag, and see if he has any letters of instructions, or any memorandums relating to us."

"Good idee," remarked Ozark, laconically, as, stepping ashore, and giving the painter of the dug-out—a strip of untanned hide—a turn about one of the roots of the cypress, he followed Fayette.

"Step softly; there may be some one in the house," Fayette said, cautiously.

"I hain't skulked in the brush the last seven years for nothing," the outlaw replied, briefly. There was indeed little need of warning, for caution had become a second nature to the man who had been hunted like a wild beast.

With stealthy tread the two approached the house, and great was their astonishment when the sounds of men's voices fell upon their ears, coming from the room wherein the huge log-fire blazed.

After a whispered conference, the two crept cautiously up to the building, and peered in through one of the cracks between the logs.

The fire within the room—the only light—fully revealed the inmates to the gaze of the watcher.

Two men were within the square log-chamber, reclining at full length before the fire, stretched out on bear-skin robes, and smoking.

One of the men the two watchers knew well enough, a lieutenant of the 41st United States Infantry—a portion of which regiment was stationed at Fort Smith above, on the river—by name Albion Winnie. He was a good-looking gentleman of about thirty years of age, rather above the medium height, and stoutly built; a square, full face, clear blue eyes, yellow hair, cut short; heavy, yellow mustache and pointed imperial. His face betrayed unfailing good-humor, and yet stern resolution. The lieutenant was attired in a blue undress uniform, which evidently had seen considerable service. It was plainly to be perceived that he was equipped for a hunting-campaign.

The second man in the room, who was indulging in cigarettes, Mexican-fashion, was a stranger to both Fayette and the outlaw, and they looked upon him in wonder; the strangeness of his costume excited their curiosity.

A single glance at the muscular figure, attired in the red blanket-coat, and we recognize the careless stranger who had so oddly announced to pretty Missouri Smith that he was The-Man-from-Texas.

With eyes and ears both intent, the United States Assessor, Fayette, and the outlaw, Yell Ozark, listened to the conversation between the army officer and the stranger.

"Seems like old times on the Plains, doesn't it?" Winnie said, reflectively, as he smoked his brier-wood pipe, and gazed upon the blazing logs.

"Yes, a little," the other replied, lighting a fresh cigarette, which he had deftly rolled up between his thumb and finger.

"Why, Francis, old fellow, you might have knocked me down with a feather when I met you to-day on the edge of the clearing. If you hadn't stopped my mouth, I should have yelled your name right out. So, you're to be overseer to old Smith, eh? Well, look out for Missouri! From what you told me, I'd be willing to bet a month's pay that she is in love with you already."

"How's that?" whispered Yell to Fayette; "reckon you'll have to salivate this gay rooster, or he'll jump your claim and take the gal."

"Hush!" Fayette said, as Winnie continued his speech.

"But, I say, you haven't explained yet your motive for this disguise."

"That is easily done," the other replied. "In the year 1863 my father was murdered somewhere near this town. Before he died, he wrote the name of his murderer on a certain legal document; quite romantic, too, the way it was done. He took a quill tooth-pick from his pocket, and his ink was the blood which streamed from his wounds. The knowledge of this only came to me about a month ago, and as soon as I could arrange my affairs, I started for Smithville. Now I am on the ground, under an assumed name. I shall get that legal paper into my hands as soon as possible, find the name of the man who killed my father, and then—"

"You'll have a settlement with the gentleman?"

"Extremely probable," The-Man-from-Texas observed, puffing a huge cloud of smoke from his mouth.

And in the air, beneath the stars, Fayette and the outlaw looked at each other, a strange expression upon their faces.

CHAPTER IV.

A POISONED SHAFT.

ON the outskirts of the "city" of Smithville, by the road leading westward to Fort Smith, stood a little whitewashed shanty. It was only some ten feet square, and divided into two rooms, one over the other.

By the side of the house was a little garden patch, roughly fenced in with brush from the neighboring wood.

And by the door of the shanty, which was exactly in the center of the building, a few little wild vines, transplanted from their native woods, were trained on a rudely-constructed trellis.

The door of the shanty was open, and the rays of the self-same sun that had shone down upon Will Fayette entering the gloomy bounds of Black-Jack Swamp, fell now upon the figure of a woman, seated on a low stool by the doorway, intently engaged in the perusal of a letter.

The woman was girlish in appearance, although she had seen her twenty-eighth year; but she was slight in figure and young in face, and looked more like a girl of eighteen than a woman of twenty-eight. Yet her face was an earnest, sad one, and could not be termed beautiful, although she was not ugly. The face was more square than round; with high cheek-bones, a broad, high forehead; firm-set, resolute chin and light-blue eyes, cold and clear; the complexion was inclined to sallowness, and there was not a tinge of color in the cheeks.

She was dressed very plainly, but neatly, in a dark calico, with a little white collar and dainty white cuffs. Her light yellow hair, which grew in great profusion, was braided and arranged in a simple coil at the back of her head.

This girl-woman, who sat by the doorway, with the last red rays of the sinking sun shining full upon her, reading the first love-letter which she had ever received in all her life, calm as a marble statue, with not a pulse quickened by the impassioned words, occupied quite a peculiar position in the little social world of Smithville.

She was called Mercie Adams, and was a school-teacher from Massachusetts. Although evidently a lady by birth and education, yet, when she first came to reside in Smithville, she had been unable to procure board at any house in the village and had been forced to take up her quarters on the outskirts of the town.

The reason is easily told. She had been sent to the South by the Freedman's Bureau to teach the negroes.

But, little by little, the resolute "Yankee school-ma'am" had lived the prejudice down. She had taken possession of the little shanty and kept herself to herself, attending strictly to her duties. Instead of a firebrand, she had turned out to be a messenger of peace and good-will.

Nowhere in the whole State of Arkansas was there less trouble between the blacks and whites—the freedmen and their former masters—than in Franklin county. This was to be attributed no less to the good counsel given by the school-teacher and the better informed of the negroes than to the solid good sense of the leading planters, men like General Smith and the banker, old Fayette. They had accepted the situation in good faith, and sought to make the best of it.

With the exception of the acts of the outlaw, Yell Ozark, no lawless deeds of violence had disturbed the peace of the county since the close of the war.

At first Mercie had been utterly unnoticed by the good people of Smithville; they all became suddenly blind when they saw her approaching. But, little by little, they became conscious that there was such a person as the school-teacher. First they had looked at her, next they had bowed, and some few young men of the village, bolder spirits than the rest, had ventured to remark as they passed: "A fine day, ma'am," or some other harmless and polite expression.

And at last some of the maids and matrons of the infant metropolis had really debated among themselves as to the propriety of making a formal call upon the school-teacher.

As Mercie sat reading the letter over and over again, as though unable to comprehend the sweet words, a dark form obscured the doorway and shut out the light of the sun.

She looked up from her letter and beheld a tall, portly man, dressed in a dark suit; he had iron-gray hair and a round, fat, florid face, smoothly shaven; his eyes were so small in comparison with the rest of his face that they seemed like two black beads rather than eyes.

This gentleman was no stranger to Mercie. He was proprietor of the largest store in the village, and the huge sign on the outside announced his name as Job Foxcroft.

He had come to Smithville two years before from St. Louis, as he stated, and had gone at once into business. Possessed, apparently, of considerable means, he had started in excellent style, and had succeeded in establishing a fine trade. From the first he had sought the custom of the negroes, and had played his game so shrewdly as to get nearly all of the country trade, and had made himself so popular with the blacks that when he ran for Justice of the Peace he got the negro vote solid, beating his opponent out of sight; and yet Foxcroft was well liked by the white planters, too. He was a popular man with all classes. A little given to Scriptural quotations, he was continually preaching peace, and there were few men in Franklin county whose words had greater weight.

"Good-evening, Miss Mercie," Foxcroft said, blandly, as he stood in the doorway, and his keen little eyes glanced down searchingly at the letter which she held in her hand.

So far the store-keeper had been the only one who had sought an intimacy with her, and, with the quick instinct of woman, she had guessed that he was beginning to look upon her with more than the eyes of a friend. This discovery did not please Mercie, for she had taken a sudden and unaccountable dislike to the portly and smooth-tongued Job.

"Good-evening, sir," she replied, folding up her letter calmly, and rising as she spoke. She had detected in what direction his eyes were wandering.

"May I come in, Miss Mercie?" he asked, smiling, blandly.

"If you like, sir," she replied, coldly, retreating from the doorway into the room, and putting her letter into her pocket.

Without waiting for a more pressing invitation Foxcroft removed his hat and entered the little room, which was as neat as wax, although very scantily furnished.

Helping himself to a chair he sat down and then surveyed the girl, with a bland smile upon his fat face.

Mercie was standing by the little open window, gazing or upon the broad surface of the river, which was in full view from the house.

"I hope that I did not disturb you in the perusal of your letter?" he remarked.

"Oh, no, sir; I had already read it," Mercie replied, absently.

"From Lieutenant Winnie, I presume?" he continued, in an insinuating way.

The girl looked at him for a moment, just a little surprised.

"How could you guess who the letter was from?" she asked, coldly, and evidently annoyed.

"Why, my dear child! the most simple thing in the world!" he replied, blandly and innocently. "As I was assorting the mail last night I noticed the letter addressed to you, and I also noticed that it was post-marked Fort Smith. Naturally, knowing that Lieutenant Winnie was stationed there and that he was a friend of yours, I guessed that the letter was from him."

Foxcroft was postmaster of Smithville, and the post-office was located in the back part of his store.

The girl did not speak, and again turned her attention to the river. It was plainly to be seen that she was annoyed and wished to get rid of her visitor as soon as possible.

Foxcroft did not seem to notice this and was very slow to take the hint.

"The lieutenant got here before his letter, or rather before you received it," Foxcroft added.

"Is he in town?" she asked, coolly and carelessly, as if the knowledge was of very little importance to her.

"Yes, he was this morning. Old Uncle Snow met him. He has come down to hunt with Gol Adair. Ah, my dear child, I wish I was sure that ducks and bears were the only prey that this raging lion of a soldier has come down to our quiet village after. Scarlet in sin are these young men of the army. They are like sailors; they have a dozen wives all at the same time."

The lip of the girl curled just a little as she heard this speech. It did not please her, and she understood the object of it.

"The lieutenant never impressed me as being any better nor worse than other young men of his age," she said, quietly.

"You are young in years yet," he replied, shaking his head, gravely. "My heart quaked within me when I found that you were in correspondence with this son of Belial. I am credibly informed that the lieutenant married an Indian woman on the frontier somewhere, and I thought it was my duty to warn you. I trust you will excuse me." And then, still smiling, Job rose from his seat and withdrew, leaving the poisoned shaft to rankle in the girl's heart.

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW OVERSEER.

In due time the "Sunny South," the first boat up from Little Rock, arrived at Smithville, and on board the Sunny South was General Leonidas W. Smith, the father of Missouri.

General Smith was tall of stature and commanding in appearance. He had a large, full face, clear brown eyes, a huge beard of the same color, and his long, light-brown hair he wore in carefully-adjusted ringlets which came 'way down over his coat-collar.

The General was not a man to be passed by without calling for a second glance.

During the war, General Smith had won the reputation of being an able and experienced officer, one really second to no man of his grade in the whole Southern army.

Rumor whispered, though, that, however successful the General had been as a military man, he was not equally successful as a planter; and it was shrewdly guessed that the gallant General had about all he could do to make "both ends meet," as the saying is, at the close of the year.

Before the war, "Piney-wood," so the General's place was called, had consisted of some two thousand acres, reputed to be as good land as any in the Arkansas bottom; but the ravages of war had played sad havoc with the well-ordered plantation; and when the General laid down his sword to take up the plow—like another Cincinnatus—and returned again to Piney-wood, he found a house but a little better than a ruin, and an estate relapsing rapidly to the primitive wilderness from which the first Smith—the founder of the town of Smithville—had reclaimed it.

The General knew what a dangerous experiment it was to change order of battle in front of a vigilant enemy, and had shrewdly guessed that a creditor pressing for the payment

of a mortgage overdue was about as ugly a customer as could well be encountered.

The house was almost a ruin; stock and fences were gone; the slaves were all free; and the land, now overgrown with weeds, was all that remained of the once fine estate.

A few scratches of the pen and away went a thousand broad acres to satisfy the mortgage; a few scratches more and away went five hundred acres of the best cotton-land of the thousand left. The money received from that—the General had "roped in" a Northerner who had got the "cotton fever" bad and who was willing to pay cash down, to buy the five hundred acres—went to repairing the mansion house and fences and to restocking the place. Then Smith got a mortgage for three thousand dollars on the house and the five hundred acres remaining, which money he used up for supplies for his hands, seeds, etc.

For the first year the General got on very well, but the second was tough work; cotton was low, the worm got in the crop, the darkies were absorbed in politics and were not to be depended upon for regular work at the very time when every hand was needed in the field, and the large class of poor whites, who occupied their time in hanging round the saloons at the landing and hunting in the swamps, stood upon their dignity as "high-toned gentlemen," when the General, in despair, sought their assistance to save his crop, and asked him if he were "gwine crazy," for to think they'd "pick his dog-goned cotton?" Whereupon the doughty soldier cursed them, up hill and down, for a set of lazy scamps, and swore that, the moment he got a vote, he'd swallow the whole Radical ticket to spite 'em.

That year Smith was out a thousand dollars, and, to add to his misfortunes, a hundred bales of cotton that he had held back, waiting for a rise, and shipped in the spring, were burnt up going down the river when the boiler of the De Arc exploded, and the insurance company that had insured the bales was "bu'sted" by some heavy losses just at that time, and it was rumored wouldn't be able to pay twenty-five cents on the dollar.

So that first of April, 1868, found General Smith in a pretty tight place, financially speaking.

Piney-wood was about two miles back of the landing.

The General had been home three hours, and was busy at his desk, trying to devise some means to get out of his present difficulties, when "Sam," the General's valet, announced that a "gemman, sir," wished to see him about the overseership.

The General had been a good deal worried with his overseers. The first one had got drunk regularly; the second one had robbed him; the third one was too lazy to be of much use; while the fourth knew just as much about taking charge of a plantation as he did about navigating a balloon.

"Some other poor shoat, I suppose," the General muttered, in a tone of irritation. The examination of bills due the coming first of May, which he saw no way of either meeting or staving off, had not improved the General's temper.

"Dis yere gemman's no poor shoat, massa," Sam said, presuming as favored servants will upon the good-nature of his master; "he's a whopper, 'most big as you are, sir. He'd make dem lazy nigs stand round, for sure."

"Show him up, Sam, and I'll see what he knows."

Soon the negro conducted The-Man-from-Texas into the presence of Smith.

"Dat's de General, sar," and then Sam discreetly withdrew.

"Morning, sir," the stranger said, in his easy way. "I heard that you was in want of an overseer, and I've come to apply for the situation."

With a single glance of his keen brown eyes the old soldier had taken in the fine proportions of the applicant. There was a look of frankness and of honesty in the bronzed face of the young man that took Smith's fancy. He had all of Frederick the Great's admiration of stalwart, well-built men.

"Ah, yes; I do want an overseer," Smith said. "What can you do?"

There was a twinkle in the eyes of the stranger and a quiet smile about the corners of his mouth as the answer was given:

"Well, General, I can break and tame the wildest horse you can bring me; I can fling a lasso around the hind leg of a wild steer when he's in full gallop; I can throw a bowie with any two-legged critter from here to the Pacific; I'm

plum-sure with either revolver, rifle or shot-gun; I don't take a back seat at a leetle game of poker for any man in the State of Arkansas; I'm tolerably fair at a squar' meal, and I can drink whisky with any corn-cracker on the Mississippi; I can't lie, and I *won't* steal. I think, General, that these are about all the accomplishments I can honestly boast of."

The old soldier had listened to the gravely-spoken speech of the would-be overseer with a good deal of amazement, but the frankness of the man pleased him.

"These little gifts that you have mentioned are not exactly required of an overseer," he said.

"General, I'll own right up," the stranger replied, frankly; "I'm just as green as they make 'em in regard to running a plantation, but I'm willing to learn, and I know how to obey orders. Just tell how you want a thing done, and set me over the hands, they'll *do* it, or there'll be trouble in the camp, and a chance for a first-class funeral in the morning."

The old soldier laughed.

"All right!" he exclaimed; "I guess that you're the man for my money. Sit down, sir; excuse my not offering you a seat before. I have been looking over my books, and got my head so muddled up, that I really neglected the courtesy due to a gentleman. What may I call your name?"

"Francis Texas."

The man did not betray any sign that the name was familiar to him, whereupon Texas instantly guessed that Missouri had not spoken of him to her father.

"And now, Mr. Texas, in regard to the wages?"

"I would rather not speak of that just now, General," the young man said, in his frank, impulsive way. "Wait, look after me a bit, and see what I'm worth. I'm only a green hand, you know; and maybe I can't tell corn from cotton when they are growing in the field."

"Just as you say," the old soldier replied. "Of course you will make one of the household? Only a little family, now, sir—myself and daughter. A fine girl, sir. Perhaps you think that a father's natural pride prompts that praise, but when you see her, you'll see that I only speak the truth." Then the sound of Missouri's footsteps, on the broad piazza, caught his ears. "There she is, now."

CHAPTER VI.

THE OUTLAWS OF THE SWAMP.

A PICTURE worthy of the pencil of the great Italian brigand painter, famed Salvator Rosa.

The lagoon of Black-Jack Swamp by night; inky darkness resting upon the waters, and a hole burnt in the sable gloom by a pine-knot brand held in the hand of the outlaw, Yell Ozark, who was standing on the bank of the lagoon, with one foot resting carelessly on the bow of the dug-out, holding it in its place by the shore.

With one hand Ozark held the flaming brand on high, evidently as a guide for some one whom he expected coming through the swamp; in the other he grasped the barrel of the shot-gun—his constant companion—the butt of which was resting on the ground.

Five paces from him, peering through the darkness into the swamp, and with his head a little inclined to one side, as if with intent to listen, was a gigantic negro, black as the ace of spades, and cast in the mold of Atlas, who bore the world upon his broad shoulders.

The negro was known as King Congo, and was probably as pure a specimen of the African race as could be found in all America.

Captured when a boy by the Cuban slavers, and from Cuba brought to Louisiana, and then grown to manhood, fiery, and hard to manage, transferred to the Red-River country, up on the line of the Indian territory, the place of banishment in the old time for dangerous and intractable slaves. In vain his masters had bestowed upon him good Christian names, such as Sambo Wilson, Pompey Jones, and the like, but the memory of his far-off African home was in his brain, and the blood of a long line of warlike kings flowed from his heart. If the cruel white man had not torn him from his home, he would have been a king among his people, and so he said proudly that his name was King Congo.

The Red River planter—a dark, stern man, reported to have been a slaver himself in his younger days, with a tinge of piracy in the far-off Southern Seas hinted at—remarked,

as he purchased the sullen, handcuffed-slave, that he would "fetch the devil out of him," when he got him up the Red, and so he did. At the first blow given him, on the far-off plantation, above the "raft" of the Red-River, the negro king raised his manacled wrists, and struck his master dead at his feet with a single blow, then fled to the woods and swamps.

His life from that time up to the close of the war, no one knew except himself.

In 1865 he had appeared in Smithville. Freed by the war he had become quite a leader among the blacks, but his counsels tended more to evil than good. The planters regarded him as a vagabond and outlaw, as he never worked, but apparently lived by hunting, and from what the negroes gave him out of fear.

His enormous strength and savage disposition made him an object of terror, both to the whites and blacks.

King Congo bore an especial hatred to General Smith, as the planter had once openly said that if he caught the negro tampering with the hands on his place, he would shoot him on sight; and it was really owing to the machinations of King Congo, that a large portion of Smith's hands had deserted him just at the pressing time of the season the previous year.

King Congo was rudely clad in a "hickory" shirt, open at the throat, exposing his brawny breast, and a pair of blue soldier-pantaloon. On his feet he wore a pair of Indian moccasins. His head was uncovered; he utterly disdained a hat. He was leaning upon a long rifle, with a barrel utterly out of proportion with the rudely-made stock. It was, evidently, the production of some backwoods gunsmith, and a sorry bungler at the craft, at that. In his belt a long, ugly-looking knife was thrust.

The stars in the sky shone down upon the dark waters of the lagoon, and peered through the leafy branches of the huge cypress trees, now fragrant with bursting buds and young leaves called into being by the spring's life-giving touch.

"Do you see the durned critters?" Ozark asked, impatiently.

"No; me no see 'em," the negro replied. The African had a strange peculiarity for one of his race; he spoke with very little negro accent; in fact, much more like a red-skin than an African.

"I wish that they would hurry up, dog-gone 'em!" muttered the outlaw.

It was evident that Ozark and King Congo waited for visitors to their island retreat.

"They come soon," the negro replied, still peering intently into the dense thicket, looking toward Smithville.

"That infernal fat cuss is always late," growled Ozark.

"A snake is always much quick, too," rejoined the negro, significantly.

"You're right thar, Congo!" A dark look settled upon the guerrilla's sallow face. "He's a reg'lar black snake, and with a swallow like an alligator. He'd better not try any of his tricks on us, though, or I'll take him by the tail, and snap his snake-ship's head off, durn him!"

"Ah!" and the negro held up his hand in warning.

"Do you hear 'em, eh?"

"Yes; me hear noise; it's 'um or b'ar."

Then to the ears of the outlaw, less keen than those of the half-savage, came the sound of something stumbling a passage through the dark recesses of the swamp.

"It's them for sure," said Ozark; "no one else would come this way after nightfall."

The sound grew nearer and nearer, and at last, guided by the light of the flaming pitch-pine knot, the outlaw's torch, two men emerged from the tangled undergrowth into the little open space by the side of the lagoon.

The first of the two was William Fayette; the second, the portly storekeeper, Job Foxcroft, who was completely wind ed by his tramp through the mazes of the "slash," and his struggle with the briers and wild vines of the swamp.

Both Fayette and Foxcroft were armed with shot-guns.

"Dog-goned long time you bin a-coming," Ozark said, sulkily. "You said an hour after sundown, and it's a blamed sight nearer three hours than one."

"We couldn't very well leave the town until after the darkness set in, for fear some inquisitive fool might take it into his head to follow us," answered Fayette. "We took our guns along, as it was, so that if any one should happen to run across us, going or returning, we could give as an excuse for our nocturnal tramp that we had been after a deer down to the Bayou."

And while Fayette had been making this explanation,

Foxcroft had been looking around him, and striving to recover his breath.

"I haven't had such a tramp for many a long day," he said, in a tone of disgust.

"Not since the time the officers were after you, eh?" Ozark observed, with a chuckle.

"What the devil do you mean by that?" demanded Foxcroft, evidently annoyed.

"Oh, nothing; a joke, that's all," the outlaw replied, carelessly, but he winked at Fayette as he spoke.

"I don't see any use of your dragging us 'way out here, Ozark," the portly storekeeper said. "My hands and face are all scratched by the brambles, and I stepped into a mud-hole back, up to my knees."

"Ozark, aren't you afraid that the light will attract the attention of some night hunter, and so lead to the discovery of your hiding-place?" Fayette asked, referring to the pitch-pine brand that the outlaw held.

"I reckon that thar ain't much danger; 'most all the folks round hyer think that the swamp is haunted, and thar ain't a nig for ten miles that would trust himself inside the outer circle after sundown. I reckon, too, that thar ain't many white men that would, either, for that matter."

"But why couldn't you come into town, instead of dragging us out into this infernal mud-hole? I shall get the swamp-fever, sure," and the comfort-loving storekeeper shivered at the very thought.

"I had just as lief not trust myself down to the Landing," replied Ozark, quietly. "I reckon that this hyer sodger ain't round Smithville for nothing. I ain't tired 'nough of the game to throw my hand up yet. But come, we're losing time. Do you know whar you're going, old man?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE COUNCIL BY NIGHT.

Foxcroft looked a little astonished at the abrupt question.

"Well, I suppose to some secret haunt of yours," he replied.

"You're right; to my castle; the castle of the man that's hunted down like a wild beast; they'd put the bloodhounds arter me if they could, only the beasts won't trail a white man. I reckon that thar ain't a Federal officer up to Fort Smith that wouldn't give you a heap of dollars for to guide a party of the blue-coats to this hyer spot. But do you know what I'd do to the man that betrayed me? I'd give him the contents of both barrels of my shot-gun, even if I knew I'd be strung up to the nearest tree the next minit!" the outlaw exclaimed, fiercely.

"There is no use in your talking in that way," Foxcroft said, evidently ill at ease. "I could not make any thing by betraying you; we're all in together, and of course must stand by each other."

"Maybe hang so, some time," King Congo suggested, gravely.

The portly storekeeper shivered again.

"I don't see any use of your making such cursed unpleasant remarks!" he exclaimed, angrily.

"Git in, old man," Ozark said, stooping down and laying hold of the bow of the dug-out to steady it. "Look out how you step, fur she's as cranky as an egg-shell, and ef you ain't keerful she'll spill ye into the crick, and that will be wuss than the mud-hole."

It is perhaps hardly necessary to remark that, after this caution, Foxcroft was extremely careful how he bestowed his portly and well-preserved person on board the frail craft.

The dug-out was quite a small one, only capable of holding two; so Ozark ferried Foxcroft over to the little island, that loomed up dim and misty in the starlight; left him there, and returning, carried over Fayette and the negro, one by one.

The dense canebrake which surrounded the island, growing close to the water's edge, apparently presented a barrier capable of keeping out all intrusion, but a passage had been cut through the canes at a certain point and a little harbor hollowed out in the shore sufficient to receive the dug-out, inside the line of the canebrake.

The center of the island was some three or four feet above the level of the water, and there, under the shelter of a gigantic cypress tree, was the home of the outlaw: a small,

square hut, just about high enough for a man to stand upright in, and rudely constructed out of cypress boughs thatched with fine branches.

In the center of the hut, Indian fashion, blazed a log fire, the smoke of which found an exit through a hole in the roof.

A few bear and wolf-skins were scattered about the hut, serving evidently for chairs, bed and table.

The four men seated themselves on the skins around the fire.

"Now then, fur the business afore the meeting," Ozark remarked. "Fust and foremost, that sodger, Winnie; what is he doing down here?"

"He's not after Yell," Foxcroft answered at once.

"Are you sure of that?" Fayette asked. "It is very suspicious. He has avoided the landing and taken up his quarters with Gol Adair. It looks to me as if, under pretense of a hunting-excursion, he had come down here to spy out Ozark's hiding-place in the swamp."

"I know that it is not so," Foxcroft said, decidedly, "for I have discovered what he is after. It's this girl, Mercie Adams, the school-teacher. A letter for her came from Fort Smith yesterday; and, as I guessed it was from the lieutenant—you see, I am a little interested in that quarter myself—I took the liberty of holding the envelope over a steaming tea-kettle, and so unsealed it without hurting it in the least. Then I read the letter. It was an offer of marriage, and he stated that he had a leave of absence for a month, and he would give her that time to consider the matter, and that he should amuse himself hunting the mean time. After I read the letter I sealed it up again, so of course the girl had no suspicions that it had been tampered with."

"At the same time it may be that his purpose down here is to look after us as well as the girl," Fayette observed, thoughtfully. "We must think of some way to start him off."

"Why not go for the gal?" Ozark asked. "I've bin wanting to clean out that durned school-marm fur a long time. What business has she got down hyer, I'd like to know, teaching the nigs? I'll jist 'light down on her some dark night and skeer her out of her boots. I'll jist tell her ef she don't git up and git, she'll be a dead gal the fust thing she knows."

"That will do; no need to use actual violence, you know, Ozark; the threat will be enough," Fayette said.

"Yes, I reckon so," the outlaw observed, complacently. "I never told a man I'd go fur him yit, that I didn't keep my word. When Yell Ozark puts his mark on a man, he may as well go and buy his coffin and pick out whar he wants to be buried."

"And now for this stranger that has come to town," Fayette asked.

"You mean the young fellow with the red blanket-coat?" Foxcroft asked.

"Yes; I believe that old Smith has engaged him as his overseer."

"Yes, so I heard, too," Foxcroft declared.

"Smith is pretty deep in the mire, now; he mustn't have a chance to get out," Fayette remarked, thoughtfully.

"Well, this new-comer won't be apt to help him much, judging by his looks," observed Foxcroft. "He's more like a cattle-driver than an overseer."

"The only thing is, if he can keep his hands to work, and they get a good crop in all right, Smith may be able to get an advance on it. Our mortgage is due the first of May, and there's considerable back-interest, too," Fayette suggested. "You see, my game is this: I want old Smith's daughter Missouri, but the young lady hasn't seen proper to take a fancy to me, yet; but if I can get the father on my side, and appear to Missouri as a man who is willing to sacrifice himself to save her father from ruin, she is just romantic enough to be captivated by the idea. But, I don't like this overseer, and I have heard that the girl has taken a fancy to him."

Foxcroft opened his eyes in astonishment.

"Why, has Miss Smith met the fellow before?"

"Yes; I don't understand where or when, but they nave met. Now, I think it is really necessary to run this overseer out of Smithville."

"Where does he come from, anyway?" Foxcroft demanded.

"He's from some town in the East; from York State, I

think. Let me see; what was the name of that town?" Fayette asked, thoughtfully, apparently looking into the fire, but in reality keeping a close watch on Foxcroft's face. "Oh! Penn Yan. He's after some fellow who levanted from Penn Yan."

Foxcroft's face turned ashy pale, and great drops of sweat came out on his forehead.

"How cursed close it is here," he muttered, taking out his handkerchief and mopping his face with it. Fayette and Ozark exchanged glances, while King Congo looked on, evidently unable to comprehend the scene.

"Oh, decidedly, he must be got out of the way!" Foxcroft exclaimed, abruptly, a tremulous tone in his voice. "He might take the girl away from you, Fayette. We must run him out some way; I'll do all I can to help!"

"I've no doubt of it," Fayette said, dryly, while the outlaw had to turn his head to conceal the grin upon his face.

"But how can we do it?" queried Foxcroft, anxiously, never noticing Fayette's peculiar reply.

"King Congo here must try his hand at the stranger," said Fayette. "You must stir up the hands to quit work, and if the overseer interferes, as of course he will, you must give him a sound mauling; that is, if you can."

The negro stretched out his brawny arms, and the dim light of the fire shining on them, they glistened like arms of bronze.

"Me smash 'um!" he said, laconically.

But the stalwart negro had not seen The-Man-from-Texas, yet.

"We'll try that first; then, if you don't succeed in driving him off, we'll have him arrested for assault, and haul him up before you, Foxcroft, and you can fine him so heavily that he'll be obliged to get out. I guess we can stretch the law a little."

CHAPTER VIII.

OZARK'S LOVE.

FOXCRIFT pondered thoughtfully over the question for a few minutes, then said:

"Oh, yes, I guess we can, if the affair is worked the right way. You must be careful, Congo, to get him to strike you first, and if you can have two or three of your friends handy to swear good and strong that he provoked the fuss, why, I can very easily sweat him with a heavy fine, and then, afterward, I can give him a chance to break and run for it."

"Me'd ruther smash 'um!" the negro growled, discontentedly.

"Well, you can try that first," Fayette said.

"I say, Will," exclaimed the outlaw, suddenly, "don't you think that you kin get a pardon for me? I'm getting tired of this wild-beast life; 'sides, I want to get married ag'in."

"I do not think that I can, Ozark," Fayette replied, gravely.

"They made it all right with Crockett and a half a dozen others jist as bad as I was!" remonstrated Ozark, sulkily.

"Not quite in the same position as yourself, Yell. If you had come in and surrendered at the close of the war, with the rest, why, it would have been all right; but since that time you have committed some acts that look a good deal like murder," Fayette said.

"Allers did it in fair fight," Ozark rejoined, still sullenly.

"Not exactly, Yell. You can't call the shooting of Tom Warren, the assessor, a fair fight. Why, man, you called him to his door in the night and put two loads of buckshot into him, before he could lift a finger."

"Didn't he hunt me through the brush with twenty or thirty soldiers, the week before, jist as if I had bin a b'ar or a wildcat?" Ozark demanded, savagely. "And who advised me, too, to call him out in the night and riddle him?"

"I believe that I gave you the advice," Fayette replied, coolly, and not in the least intimidated by the threatening manner of the outlaw.

"It wasn't your political friends down to the Rock that made you assessor of this district; it was Yell Ozark and his shot-gun!" cried the outlaw, angrily. "I didn't see what you was after, then, but I do now. You used me as a cat's-paw to pull your hot chestnuts outen the fire. I was a blamed fool to kill the assessor, for the blue-coats have hunted me as if I was a wolf, ever since."

"And who has stood your friend?" questioned Fayette, never once losing his temper; "who gave you timely warning when the soldiers were after you, so that you could either get into the swamps or run out of the county? Who has saved you from the traps that have been laid for you, ten times at least?"

"Well, I s'pose you have," Yell answered, doggedly.

"What do you talk like an idiot for, then? The benefit derived from the killing of Tom Warren has not been all on one side, and you know it well enough."

"Now, it's no use to have any words about the matter," Foxcroft interposed, in his smooth, oily way. "We'll all help each other, of course, and there's no use discussing who gets the most benefit from our little partnership. The only thing is to stick to each other and try and work for our mutual advantage."

"I'm getting tired of skulking in the swamps," Ozark rejoined; "I'd like to have a plantation of my own ag'in. I have got my eye on a gal that I think will suit me, and if I can git her, I'll cl'ar out the fust thing you know, and hop over the line into the Injun country. Thar's mighty good cotton land down on the Red, nigh the Luzianny line."

"What girl is it?" Fayette asked.

"Tilda Forsyth, my wife's sister. She lives on the Ozark place, down the river, below Catfish Bayou."

"By the way, what ever became of your wife, Yell?" Fayette asked, carelessly.

"She died of a fever," Ozark replied, his face growing dark as he spoke. "My place up on the Mulberry was terribly low and unhealthy. Some folks said that I killed her, 'cos I hit her a slap in the face when I was drunk, one night, but they lie, dog-gone 'em! I'm a gentleman, I am, and of good family, too, though I am rough and ready. I didn't slap her hard enough to kill a 'skeeter, and she deserved it, too; she jawed me and said that I was nothing but a poor, mean, drunken shoat, and I'll 'low that I ain't a-going to stand any woman's 'buse!"

There was just a little curl to Fayette's lip as he listened to the outlaw's explanation, but Yell did not notice it.

"Well, what does Tilda say about it?" Fayette asked.

"Have you told her any thing about the matter?"

"I kinder hinted 'bout it the last time I was down thar," Yell replied. "I told her that I felt lonely skulking round in the swamps like a dog-goned pole-cat, and said that ef I could find a woman to tie to, I'd pull up stakes and hop across the Arkansas line right lively."

"Did she seem to understand what you were driving at?" Fayette persisted.

"I reckon she did."

"Did she seem to cotton to the idea?"

"Nary time," replied the outlaw, laconically; "she kinder got her back up like a wildcat, and said that I had better go and marry a she-bear—a wife that could gi'n me slap for slap and maybe hit a durned sight harder than I could. I see'd at once then that she'd heerd that lie 'bout my killing her sister."

"Did you attempt to get her out of that idea?"

"Durn my cats!" cried Yell, in astonishment; "do you 'pose I'd waste my time trying to talk with a woman when she's got her back up? Not a bit of it! When my wife used to gi'n me any talk back, I never tried to jaw with her. I allers fatched her a couple of cracks side of the head, and that salivated her. Women are jist like mules; ef they don't get their regular allowance of whippings, it makes 'em sick."

"Then you've made up your mind to have the girl, anyway?"

"Of course I have; I'll fetch her round," Yell said, confidently. "I know what the matter is now. I kinder had a suspicion, t'other day, so I jist lay in the bush and watched the house; and, jist as I thought, that Dutch cuss that lives with Gol Adair came to the cl'aring. I had a good mind to draw a bead on him. If I had ever drawn back the hammer of this hyer shot-gun, I would have let daylight right through him!" And the outlaw patted the barrels of the gun that lay by his side affectionately with his hand, as he spoke.

A grave look appeared on Fayette's face.

"You had better let the Dutchman alone," he said.

"Why so?" demanded Ozark, with visible fierceness.

"Because, if he is put out of the way and the deed is traced to you, it will start old Gol Adair on your trail, and he's good enough tracker to hunt you down, even here," Fayette replied.

"I'll give him a charge of buckshot too," protested Yell,

boastfully. "I reckon I can salivate him now and not half try!"

"Now, take my advice and let both Dutch Pete and Gol Adair alone. They don't meddle with you. Why, to my certain knowledge, Adair was offered a hundred dollars to guide the soldiers the last time they run you so close, and he refused, saying he hunted bears and not men." Fayette delivered the advice with undisguised seriousness.

"The Dutchman had better quit going after the gal, or I'll get shet of him, I tell yer."

Fayette saw that it was useless to waste further words, and rose to depart.

Foxcroft had been in a state of deep abstraction and had paid no attention at all to the conversation, but Fayette's rising startled him from his moody meditations, and he also rose to his feet.

"Come, we must get back to town. I think we have brought our game to bag although we have nothing to show for it," Fayette said, as he took up his fowling-piece.

Again the two were ferried over the lagoon, and, guided by the negro, plunged into the swamp.

CHAPTER IX.

"TRIFLES LIGHT AS AIR."

As Missouri passed the window the General called to her. "Missouri, my dear, come in."

In obedience to the request she entered the room.

Missouri wore a light fleecy dress, well suited to the balmy air of the pleasant April day, and in her hand she carried a little straw hat.

"Missouri, this is our new overseer, Mr. Texas," the General said, as the girl entered the room.

Missouri simply bowed without raising her eyes to the face of the young man, but he noticed with his keen glance, which perceived every thing without seeming to notice any thing, that a bright, quick flush swept over the girl's face.

"Missouri, I suppose the room which the last overseer occupied is all in order?"

"Yes, sir."

"You see, Mr. Texas, my little girl is quite an old woman about the house. She takes the whole charge of it. She'll make you comfortable."

"Yes, I've no doubt of it," the new overseer said, in the most innocent manner imaginable, but the girl detected a hidden meaning in the simple sentence, and raising her black eyes, shot a glance of indignation at the cool and impudent stranger, which he did not appear to notice in the least.

Then the General suggested that they had better take a look around the plantation, as he wished to commence planting in the morning, and the sooner the new overseer got used to men and things the better.

The two gentlemen departed, Texas taking leave of the young lady with a most respectful bow.

Missouri was astonished.

"Can it be that he doesn't know me?" she asked herself, in amazement. "Oh, no; that isn't possible. I really dreaded to have him come here, but if he is going to behave in this formal and respectful manner, why I don't see how he can annoy me at all."

And after coming to this conclusion, the girl's mind ought to have been easy, but it was not.

Calling her chief assistant—a colored girl of fifteen, rejoicing in the name of Butterfly—to her aid, Missouri immediately proceeded to put the overseer's room in complete order.

And then, after broom, brush and dust-pan had fulfilled their offices, Missouri halted irresolutely in the doorway as if asking herself if there wasn't any thing else that she could do to add to the comfort of the new-comer.

Glancing at the tumbler standing on the little table by the window, an idea occurred to her.

"Butterfly, run down to the garden and fetch me some of the little blue flowers that are growing by the side of the big white rosebush. Do you know where they are?"

"Yes, missy; violets, dat's what you done want," the colored damsel replied, with a knowing grin.

"Yes, run along."

Butterfly departed on a full gallop.

"I don't believe that he cares any thing for flowers, he's such a great, rough fellow," Missouri mused, thoughtfully. "But I ought to do every thing in my power to make his stay here agreeable, and perhaps he's got a sweetheart some-

where down in Texas that used to fix spring flowers in his room? I don't believe he has thought!" She seemed quite decided on this point.

Then Butterfly came trotting back with a handful of violets and green sprays.

Missouri carefully arranged them in the tumbler, filling it up with water and stopping again on the threshold, noted the effect.

"Now, remember, Butterfly, that if the gentleman asks who put the flowers there you must tell him that you *brought* them you did, you know?" Missouri felt just a little bit mean at stooping even to this slight evasion.

The intelligent daughter of Africa comprehended in an instant.

"Yes, missy; by golly, I kin swear to dat!" Butterfly responded, promptly.

Missouri descended to the kitchen and astonished old Aunt Sue, the cook, by proposing to superintend the dinner preparations.

"W'at's de matter, chile—who gwine to come?" the cook demanded, in amazement.

"Why, no one, aunty," Missouri replied, in some little confusion; "only the new overseer, that's all."

"Fore de Lord!" exclaimed the old fat cook, holding up her hands in wonder. "An' is you gwine to fool round dis yere kitchen fur a poor white trash of an overseer, burnin' your lily white han's up? Go 'long, chile! I kin 'tend to any overseer widout you."

But, Missouri would not be put out of the kitchen, and the first thing the cook knew, the girl had her sleeves rolled up, and, with an apron over her dress, was deep in the mysteries attending the concoction of a famous pudding—the recipe of which she had received from her mother.

Missouri, unlike most young girls of the South possessing wealthy parents—or of the North, either, for that matter—had been brought up by her mother—a daughter of one of the old French families of St. Louis—"Laclede stock," as the General was wont to say—to take full charge of a family, and had been early impressed with the maxim that nearly all the joys of a household spring primarily from a well-regulated table.

The dinner that day astonished the General; violets resting on green sprays in shallow cut-glass fruit-dishes shed their sweet perfume over the room.

Etiquette of course forbade the General to praise the skill of his cook, but, when the famous pudding, the General's particular favorite, was carried into the room by the grinning Butterfly, who was apparently fully conscious of the importance of the dish she bore, the old soldier could not restrain an expression of admiration.

"By Jove! old Sue has outdone herself to day," he muttered, and Missouri, demure as a kitten, doing the honors of the table, never smiled or seemed conscious of her father's satisfaction. But she watched the face of The-Man-from-Texas intently when she thought that he was not observing her, and she detected there an expression of sadness every now and then, which she could not account for.

When the new overseer retired to his room, that night, hardly had he entered it when the fragrant flowers attracted his attention.

He guessed at once from whom the thoughtful act had proceeded, and taking up one of the little flowers he pressed it to his lips and kissed it again and again. Then, with a sudden motion as though some thought had flashed across his brain, he cast the flower back into the tumbler.

"No, no, I must not think of this girl!" he muttered. "First for my task of vengeance! That fulfilled and life spared to me, I may think of love—of an earthly paradise such as the embrace of this young, beautiful and innocent girl can give me, if she will. I must get the paper in my hands as soon as possible that will give me the name of my father's murderer; then comes the chase after the man himself, for he may be a thousand miles from here; perhaps, even, he may have closed his account with earth and gone to another world."

Then he undressed and went to bed; but even in his slumbers the great black eyes of pretty Missouri haunted him.

At five in the morning he was up, and at six he was in the field overseeing the hands.

Four hours' work finished the first field, and then he gave the hands twenty minutes' rest, while he sent to the house for more seed.

A little strip of woodland ran along the side of the field,

and the negroes laid off in the shade, for the sun was getting quite warm.

Texas had sat down on a stump to meditate. The General was overseeing a field some distance off.

When the seed came, Texas rose to set his men to work, but discovered that a strange negro, of burly build, accompanied by two or three other strange blacks, was in busy conversation with the hands.

From the description the General had given him, he recognized King Congo, in the burly black, and a presentiment that there was trouble ahead came at once to him.

The overseer took a good look at the negro, measuring him with his eyes like a pugilist his opponent in the "ring;" then he advanced quietly to the group.

CHAPTER X.

STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER.

SMITH, during the walk over the plantation on the previous day, had happened incidentally to mention the name of King Congo; and Texas, struck by the singularity of the appellation, had inquired concerning the black, so that he was well posted in regard to the burly negro.

As Texas drew near to the group, he found that Congo was engaged in denouncing General Smith, and urging the hands not to work for him.

Texas saw at once that the negro relied more upon his personal appearance and threatening manner than upon the eloquence of his words, for Congo was not a ready speaker, and was but little versed in the art of oratory.

As the overseer came close to the group, he overheard the closing part of the negro's speech.

"What for you work for dis cussed white man?" the burly black exclaimed, doubling up his huge fist and shaking it threateningly at General Smith, who, busy overseeing the hands, in a neighboring field, some distance off, had no suspicion of the trouble that was brewing. "Dar's catfish in de bayou an' corn in de swamp! Don't strike a lick in de field! Starve 'um; den dey go away, an' de lan's all yours. I'll kill some of you workin' niggers 'fore long, you see if I don't. You're only fit for de white man to walk ober!" And then King Congo glared ferociously around him, and shook his huge black fist in the air.

"See here, you infernal black hippopotamus, just you make tracks and get off this plantation!" Texas said, coolly, and without a trace of excitement in his manner, stepping forward and confronting the gigantic negro.

The black field-hands drew back a few steps in wonder; they had been clustered around Congo in a little half-circle.

The overseer had advanced within a yard or so of the black, and had taken a position that would have delighted either a fencing-master or a teacher of the "manly art of self-defense;" although contrary to the general rule of the latter, he rested the weight of his body on his right foot, and the left was advanced; his right arm was carried carelessly down at his side, but the left was raised to the level of his waist and half drawn back, the forearm resting on his hip. Light, springy and graceful, he balanced his body on the forepart of his feet, just as if he were waiting for the music to strike up to glide at once into the "one—two" of the exhilarating polka.

King Congo, with a sullen scowl upon his dark face, surveyed the overseer for a moment in silence.

To tell the truth the burly negro was rather surprised at the appearance of The-Man-from-Texas.

The overseer had removed the blanket-coat, owing to the warmth of the sun, and also taken off his collar and necktie, and loosened the shirt at the neck, and the black could clearly perceive how muscular was the chest and arms which the dainty ruffled shirt covered.

Texas was no mean antagonist even for the gigantic negro, although some six inches shorter in height, and at least fifty pounds lighter in weight. But the fifty pounds of flesh extra was rather a disadvantage to Congo than otherwise, for fat will tell on a man's wind when heavy blows are to be given and parried in quick succession.

The negro was heavy and fat, clumsy in movement, and evidently entirely destitute of all knowledge of the boxer's art, while Texas, for so large a man in build, was singularly light on his feet, and graceful in his movement; and a single glance at his attitude would have betrayed to one skilled in the

use of the "gloves" that he was in "position" either to give or parry a blow.

In the parlance of the fistic art, a left-footed man is extremely difficult to "get at."

The negro, who had never before faced an opponent who knew any more about the scientific use of the weapons that nature had given him than himself, did not perceive that the overseer was within "reach," and prepared to administer a terrific "left-hander."

"Who you speak to, white man?" exclaimed King Congo, scowling darkly upon the daring overseer.

"You, you black scoundrel!" replied Texas, sternly, and there was just a slight tremor in the muscles of the left arm, a sort of quiver of impatience.

"Go 'way, or I'll walk ober you—cussed fool!" cried the black, drawing back his right arm, threateningly.

Standing as he did with his heels close together, in about the most clumsy attitude possible, a skillful boxer could not have wished for a better opportunity.

Quick as a wink, the left arm that was resting so carelessly upon the hip of the overseer, was drawn back, then shot out, and the iron-like fist, landing on the fleshy face of the negro, floored him as if he had been shot.

A cry of astonishment came from the surrounding blacks; they had witnessed many a rough scuffle, but they had never seen a man knocked down in so neat and skillful a manner before.

That The-Man-from-Texas was excited was evident; the blood was up in his face; his eyes were snapping, and his muscular arms, now both raised on guard, were working nervously like the piston of a steam engine.

Congo struck the ground with a howl like a wild beast. In all his life he had never received such a blow before. Already his head seemed swollen to twice its usual size. In all his previous battles Congo had either battered down his adversary with one or two powerful blows, or else had got him in his powerful arms, and crushed him half to death with an anaconda-like grip.

When the black regained his feet, half-crazy with rage, he found that he could not see out of his left eye. The overseer's iron-like knuckles had cut a terrible gash in the fleshy cheek underneath, and closed the eye up.

Right and left—thrashing the air like the sails of a windmill—a dozen tremendous blows the negro delivered at his foe, driving the overseer before him. Texas skillfully retreated, light on his feet as a dancing-master, hardly taking the trouble to attempt to parry the wildly directed strokes, half of which were out of distance.

The negro had wasted his tremendous strength upon the empty air, and puffing and blowing, completely winded by the violent exertion, he stopped and wearily dropped his hands to the level of his waist for a moment. Then the overseer, fresh as a daisy and light as a feather, crept within "reach" and "feinted" with his right hand at the negro's body. Clumsily Congo outstretched both hands to ward off the blow, when again, quick as a flash, the terrible left-hander landed on the fleshy face, and again King Congo went over on his back, flat on the ground.

A howl of delight went up from the negroes; all the brute part of their natures aroused, they were really enjoying the contest.

Calm and cool as an iceberg, although slightly flushed with his exertions, the overseer waited for the negro to rise.

King Congo got upon his feet very slowly. The tremendous efforts he had made in the last "round" were beginning to tell upon him, to say nothing of the effects of the two terrible blows that he had received.

The burly black was now almost blind, for the second stroke of the overseer had cut the right cheek under the eye; as if it had been gashed by a knife, and, as the swelling was increasing visibly almost every instant, it was very certain that soon the right eye would be closed as well as the left.

It was plain that the gigantic black must conquer the powerful and skillful white man within ten minutes or else Congo's star would set in darkness.

The howl that the negroes had given at the second knock-down blow had attracted the attention of the General, and perceiving the little crowd by the fringe of timber, he instantly concluded that something was wrong and came in haste to see what was the matter.

Great was his astonishment when he arrived upon the scene. It only needed a single glance for him to understand the whole affair.

The overseer, smiling and confident; the burly black,

bleeding, panting, and his face, always hideous, now rendered doubly so by the two terrible gashes that the knuckles of The-Man-from-Texas had made. The General felt all the old soldier blood in his veins swell at the sight.

"Don't mind me, boys!" he yelled; "go on with your fun. Two to one on the overseer. Time!"

The General was wildly excited.

CHAPTER XI.

'SAULT AND BATTERY.

BUT the brawny bully was slow to respond to the call. He stood looking at the overseer, who had handled him so roughly, with an expression of wonder upon his brutal face, now swollen almost beyond the possibility of recognition.

Never in all his life had he encountered such a foe, and, with the superstition common to his race, he began to believe that he was bewitched.

"Come, hurry up," Texas cried, impatiently; "come on, unless you've got all you want."

"Me kill you!" cried the black, all his anger reviving at hearing the voice of his foe.

Again the gigantic negro rushed upon his enemy, striking wildly, blow after blow, at the overseer, using all the strength of his mighty form, and again the dextrous white nimbly jumped from side to side, and retreating, gave way before the rush of the giant.

As before, the black was compelled to pause at last, strength and breath both exhausted by his powerful efforts, and then, as he had previously done, the overseer carefully "weaved" himself with distance and planted two awful blows in quick succession upon the disfigured face of the negro, but, as Congo had braced himself to receive the attack, he was not hurled to the earth as before.

Two more dreadful cuts now appeared on the negro's face, when, maddened with rage and pain, Congo dashed recklessly upon Texas.

The overseer had jumped back out of distance after striking the last powerful blows and was fully prepared for the fresh assault.

Panting for want of breath, smarting under the pain of the bleeding bruises, and almost blind from the effects of the frightful punishment he had received, Congo was as an infant now in the hands of the overseer.

The strokes and thrusts of the negro lacked power, and being given "round-armed," instead of straight from the shoulder, the white brushed the burly fists aside with his artistic guard as if they had been feathers instead of fists of bone and muscle. And then, as the giant stopped for a moment, exhausted, The-Man-from-Texas "drew himself together" and, firmly braced on his sinewy legs—steel and willow combined—dealt the negro a most terrific blow, which landed full in the center of the chest with a "thud" that sounded like the crack of a black-snake whip. The blow, delivered with all the force of the overseer's arm and body combined, lifted the negro fairly from the ground and hurled him, with a tremendous shock, senseless to the earth.

After he struck the ground, Congo's head went back with a bump which plainly told that all the fight had been knocked out of him.

"Hooray!" yelled the General, in delight, unable to express his feelings.

For a moment both the actors and the spectators in the affair stood still, a perfect tableau, just if as they expected to be immortalized by some wandering artist taking the scene on the spot by the aid of the magic camera.

The black lay motionless on the ground, evidently stunned, his body limp and the muscles relaxed; the overseer had his hands half up, as though expecting the vanquished gladiator to spring up and renew the fight; while the negroes and the General looked on with wondering eyes.

Then a change came over the scene. Texas dropped his hands, took out his handkerchief, which he had stowed away in the pistol-pocket of his pantaloons, and commenced to wipe the blood from his knuckles, which had been stained by contact with the negro's face.

"By the Lord, Mr. Texas, I believe you've killed the scoundrell!" the General exclaimed, advancing to look at the negro.

But, even as he spoke, the black began to revive.

"You had better help him, come of you," Smith said,

sternly, addressing the strange negroes, whom he recognized at once as being Congo's companions. "And, see here, my fine fellows, I don't want to see any of you skulking round my place any more; I don't mean you, Uncle Snow, but those other two. You've seen how your leader has been handled, so you just look out for yourselves."

Two of the negroes who were with Congo did not bear the best of names, having the reputation of depending more upon the stray chickens and pigs of the planters for subsistence than upon their own toil, but the third one was old Uncle Snow, a very worthy old man.

Casting a single glance at the black Hercules, who was being slowly assisted to his feet by his companions, and perceiving that he had no appetite for any more instruction in the fisticuff line, Texas called to his hands:

"Come, boys, let's get at that field; we've lost considerable time."

And, without a word regarding the late struggle, the overseer, followed by the blacks, went at once to work.

The General looked after his new hand in amazement.

"That man's a trump!" he exclaimed, emphatically. "By Jove! he's a man, he is! Why didn't Heaven give me such a son as that?"

Then the General took a look at the conquered black.

Both of Congo's eyes were closed, and his face was swollen terribly. But, now that he had recovered from the stunning effects of the blow, he was strong enough on his legs.

Congo was almost frantic with rage, but he had sense enough to know that he was thoroughly beaten and that he was no match for the white man. He had got enough, and was fully sensible of the fact, half-animal though he was.

"You's almost blind!" one of the negroes remarked, looking into Congo's face.

"Wipe de blood off!" muttered the "king," sullenly.

"You had better take him down to the doctor and have some leeches applied to his eyes," Smith said, "and let this be a lesson to you, Congo, not to come tampering with my hands again." And with this remark the General turned away and went back to his work. He fully understood that no good purpose had brought the black to his plantation.

The negroes led Congo slowly away; the conquered man satisfying his mind with fearful threats of vengeance against the overseer, old Smith and all the white people in general.

At noon-time work was stopped and the General and the overseer met at the house for dinner.

Then, in answer to the General's inquiries, Texas related how the affair had commenced.

Smith was loud in his expression of satisfaction.

"By Jove, sir, you know how to handle your fists as well as a regular pugilist!" the General exclaimed. "You gave him the most scientific thrashing that I ever saw administered, and when I was a young man I saw a good deal of that sort of thing at the North."

"I had a boxing-master for about three years," the overseer answered, carelessly; "circumstances were so that it didn't cost me any thing, and I rather liked the exercise—not that I imagined I should ever put the knowledge to any practical use."

"And he's a much heavier man than you, too."

"That didn't amount to any thing; rather in my favor than otherwise; his extra weight was fat. When I took a look at his overgrown face, I knew I could shut his eyes up with one or two good cracks. If I had let him close in on me, he might have worried me; but as long as I kept him at arm's length, all I had to do was to tap him where I pleased. I saw from the first that all he knew was brute strength."

Then they went in to dinner, and, as on the previous day, the General was astonished at the improvement in the cook's skill.

The subject of the battle-royal was not mentioned, but Texas' shrewd eyes noticed that Missouri looked earnestly at his hands, the knuckles of which were a little discolored, as he sat down to the table, and he guessed that she had heard of the affair.

Dinner over, the General and the overseer lit their cigars, preparatory to resuming work, and just as they stepped from the veranda to the ground, a horseman rode up. It was Lem Johnson, the sheriff.

"How do, General?" he said. "I've got a warrant hyer for the arrest of your overseer. 'Sault an' battery. I s'pose this gentleman's my man?"

CHAPTER XII.

A WOMAN'S WIT.

THE General stared at the sheriff in astonishment.

"What's that?" he cried, in amazement.

"I say, I've got a warrant hyer for the arrest of your overseer; 'sault and battery," repeated the officer.

"Why, you haven't had any trouble with any one, have you?" Smith asked, in wonder, turning to Texas.

"Not that I'm aware of," the overseer replied. "There must be some mistake."

"I reckon you're the man, stranger," the sheriff replied; "you answer to the description."

"Who makes the complaint; do you know, Lem?" the General asked.

"Yes; it's that big nigger, King Congo."

A low whistle of astonishment came from the General's lips.

"Well, now, this beats me!" he exclaimed. "Why, Lem, you know what a scamp that Congo is! He came on my place here this morning, tried to persuade my hands to quit work, and when my overseer here—Mr. Texas, Mr. Johnson—interfered, the nig talked back to him, chock full of fight, too. Well, he just got whaled; Johnson, you would have given ten dollars to have seen how beautiful Mr. Texas here walloped that cuss. I'm an old man, Johnson, and have traveled a good deal, but it was the prettiest fight that I ever saw in my life. The way we cleaned out Banks, down on the Red River, wasn't any thing to it."

Smith was quite excited.

"Of course, General, I don't know any thing about it," Johnson explained. "Justice of the Peace, Foxcroft, put the warrant into my hands, and of course I've got to serve it. I told the Justice that I thought it was a leetle out of my line, but you see the constable, Bill Smith, is down flat on his back with the shakes—by the way, General, Bill's some sort of a relation of yours, isn't he?"

"Yes, third cousin. Bill is sick, eh?"

"Awful! I told him when he bought that place down on the Catfish that it were powerful unhealthy," the sheriff said. "Well, as I said afore, Bill's sick, and his deputy, Jim Forsyth's gone up to Fort Smith. He went up on the Des Arc yesterday—mighty fine boat that Des Arc, General, a heap sight better than the old one; well, you see, thar wa'n't any official left in the town to serve the durned thing, fess I toted it; so I jest thought that I would oblige the Justice for onc't."

"Yes, of course I understand," Smith said; "I s'pose you will have to go in, Mr. Texas, since the warrant is out. But that beats me, Lem! The idea of coming and picking a fuss, and then going and getting out a warrant for an assault."

"That's kinder raking things," Johnson remarked, soberly. "From the looks of the dark, I should have jedged that he had had about sixteen onto him."

"Whipped him in fair fight! I saw nearly all of it myself. Johnson, you would have given twenty-five dollars to have seen the fight!" the old Arkansian exclaimed, excitedly.

"From the looks of the nig, I reckon I would, General," the sheriff said, with an air of sad reflection.

"Sam, saddle my Morgan, and the black, right away!" the General shouted to the negro, who was sunning himself outside the stable.

"Deed, sar, dat black done gone lame," replied Sam.

"You'll have to ride the spotted mustang, then; I must tell Missouri," and the General re-entered the house.

The overseer's horse had been sent to the blacksmith to be re-shod, just before dinner, and hadn't returned.

Hardly had the General closed the door behind him when he was joined by Missouri. Concealed behind the Venetian blinds of the dining room, she evidently had overheard all that had passed.

Smith was proceeding to explain, but his daughter interrupted him with the assurance that she knew all about it.

"You can have the mustang, of course, father," she said, hurriedly; "but what will they do with Mr. Texas? I'm sure the negro deserved all he got, although Mr. Texas did strike him first; but I know that that big brute said something dreadfully insulting to him."

"Why, how did you know that he struck him first?" the General asked, in amazement. "Oh, I suppose that some of the hands told you about it."

"No, father; where should I see any of the hands?" the girl replied, evidently confused.

"How the mischief, then, did you know any thing about it?" Smith questioned, in a puzzle.

"Why, I happened to be up stairs in the cupola, and saw it all from beginning to end," she replied, slowly, and in great embarrassment.

But the General was decidedly more astonished at this statement than he had been at first.

"But how could you see the affair from the cupola?" he asked; "the field is over half a mile off."

"Why, I—I had your field-glass, father," she answered, blushing red as fire as she spoke.

"Oh, I see," the old man said; and, busy as his mind was, thinking of the outrage of the overseer's arrest, he took but little notice of his child's confusion. And she, on her part, was heartily glad that he did not press his question further, and ask her what she was doing up in the cupola with the field-glass for a companion.

"We can have the mustang, then?" the General said, retreating to the door.

"Yes, certainly!" was the decided reply; "but, father, they can't trouble Mr. Texas, can they?"

"Of course not, in justice! The fellow provoked the thrashing, anyway, and deserved all he got. I suppose the idea is to make it appear an outrage on the negroes, and so make a sort of political affair out of it; but I don't think they will be able to do it in this county. The war is over and we understand it, and there is no more law-abiding community anywhere in the United States."

"But, father, if there is any trouble, you'll stand by him—you'll see him through, won't you?" asked the girl, persuasively.

"Will I?" exclaimed the old General, hastily; "by the Lord I will! I'll see him through if it takes every mule on the plantation!"

Then Smith emerged from the house to the veranda.

Sam had the General's brown Morgan mare saddled, and stood waiting with it in front of the house.

"Saddle the spotted mustang, Sam, for Mr. Texas," the planter ordered, as he mounted into the saddle, quite lightly for one of his years and build.

"Yes, sar; I done saddle de mustang. I s'pects you'd want dat!" Sam answered with a grin; and then, in obedience to his whistle, a colored boy led out the spotted mustang—Missouri's pet—from the stable, saddled and bridled.

The overseer leaped lightly into the saddle, and the party set out.

From behind the Venetian blinds, pretty Missouri watched the horsemen until they disappeared around the bend of the road.

The horsemen, riding briskly toward the landing, soon got into conversation.

"Times are changing mightily, ain't they, General?" the sheriff observed. "I kin remember the time when two gentlemen could have a nice quiet fight, and a sheriff that went to arrest one on 'em, would have bin mobbed, sure. Why, they could even use their shootin' irons, and the authorities wouldn't interfere."

"That's so," asseverated the General. "When will the examination take place?"

"Jist as soon as we git thar. The nig and his lawyer air waiting. Bob Howard's his lawyer. Bob's a good lawyer; better jedge of whisky, though."

"If they've got Bob Howard, they mean business," the General exclaimed, earnestly. "I reckon we better pick up Judge Yeil, as we go by his place. The Judge knows the law."

"I'll 'low he does, but he's the durnest old cuss for a practical joke in the hull State. I reckon ef the Jedge and Bob come together, law and whisky will suffer," the sheriff remarked, sagely.

CHAPTER XIII

"SWAPPING GOL."

In the clearing, outside his log-cabin, sat Col Adair, better known perhaps for forty miles around as Swapping Gol. Near by him was Peter Ritter, his constant companion, and the United States officer, Lieutenant Winnie.

The trio had just returned from a ducking excursion down the Arkansas; that they had been successful a half-dozen braces of wild ducks clearly proved.

Gol Adair was a little wiry, dried-up sort of man, with a skin as yellow as parchment and almost as tightly drawn over the bones as that of a mummy. His harsh yellow hair was chopped off close to his head—his own hand and a sharp-edged bowie-knife always attending to the trimming operation; his eyes were little, deep set in his head, and a greenish gray in color—more like the eyes of an animal than a man. He was dressed in a homespun suit that once had been butternut-brown in color, but exposure to wind and rain, contact with the black mud of the bayou, the yellow sands of the Arkansas and the red clay of the river-banks, to say nothing of the numerous patches of various colors, with which the thrifty Gol had at times repaired the rents and tears that brambly branches and the claws and teeth of wild beasts had made in his garments, had now so utterly changed the original color that it was hard to say which was the prevailing tint.

Gol was plainly armed—a long, ugly-looking rifle and a single twelve-inch bowie-knife being his only weapons.

Adair was quite a character. He had emigrated from upper Georgia, some thirty years before, and taken up his residence in Arkansas.

At that time peltry was plenty on the upper Arkansas and its branches, and Adair followed the occupation of a trapper for a living; but, as time passed on, the price of furs declined and the animals themselves became scarce, so Adair gave up trapping and looked around for a plantation.

And just about that time, old Colonel Smith founded the town of Smithville, and as the Catfish Bayou had been one of Gol's favorite haunts in the early days when he had first favored Arkansas with his presence, he selected about twenty acres, just above the junction of the bayou with the Arkansas, and erecting a log-cabin, assisted by the inhabitants of the city—that was to be—settled down upon his "estate."

Adair never amounted to much in the planter line, though that could not be expected of the owner of twenty acres, surrounded as he was by estates, the smallest of which was over a thousand acres in extent.

But Adair declared he wouldn't have the best plantation in the county. He wasn't a-going to be a slave to any "durned cotton crop, or any other kind of a crop—not ef he knowed hisself!"

All he wanted was five or ten bales—enough to buy groceries and liquor. Corn he could raise himself; there was plenty of fish in the bayou, and his rifle could bring him all the meat he wanted and pay for his powder, caps and balls, besides.

And as for the two or three half-wild horses that he always possessed, in the winter he turned them into the cane-brake where they fed on the young cane until they were as fat as hogs, and in the summer, the rank grass of the prairie gave them food.

Adair was noted, too, for his swapping propensities. He was never so happy as when in a trade. He had been known to start out of Smithville, riding the worst-looking "clay-bank" horse that ever a man bestrode, with a little mean open-faced silver watch in his pocket and a rusty shot-gun on his shoulder, stride over the line into the Indian nation, and come back, in a month, with a couple of fine horses worth seventy-five or eighty dollars apiece—high prices those, for even extra horses, on the upper Arkansas, before the war—an excellent double-barreled gun—or a fine rifle, maybe—two or three pistols or knives, and a good solid hunting-case watch in his pocket; all of which trophies were the products of a series of judicious swaps.

Smithville folks said Gol Adair would rather swap than eat, and as they were his near neighbors, they naturally were pretty well posted on the subject.

Adair was peculiar in another way, too. He never owned a slave, and when questioned on the subject by some zealous neighbor who had got a notion into his head that Gol belonged to that dreaded class known as "Abolitionists," the withered-up hunter simply said that they were too much trouble, and he wasn't "gwine to be a slave to any nig," himself. "They eat more'n they raised, an' would steal more'n they'd eat." This was Gol's idea on the subject. Then, too, he never troubled his head about politics. And one time, when party spirit ran high, and the anxious men on either side were drumming up all the recruits they could get, Gol Adair was finally badgered into a promise that he would come to Smithville and vote, for once in his life. And, true to his word, he walked up to the polls and voted for General George Washington for President; and when remonstrated with by the leading men of both parties, who

reminded him that the "Father of his Country" was dead, Gol replied, coolly, that it didn't "make any difference; General Washington dead would make a great deal better President than any live man that they could scare up, from Maine to Mexico, nowadays."

After that, Gol Adair was let alone, as far as politics were concerned.

When the war broke out, Adair saw at once, with his shrewd good sense, that it would be clearly impossible for him to keep out of it and remain at home. So, one fine morning before the sun was up, Gol Adair whistled his dogs around him, mounted his best horse, and "lit" out.

A party of the young hot-bloods of the village—a slip of the pen, we mean "city"—who visited Adair's cabin that very day, with intent to make him enlist or fight, found the doors of the cabin wide open, all the skins—Gol's simple substitute for furniture—gone, and a rude sign stuck in a crevice of the timber, which bore the brief but expressive inscription:

"Gone till the war quits."

Smithville saw no more of Gol Adair until the autumn of 1865; then he suddenly appeared, as usual, riding a better horse than he had gone away on, and dropped right back again into his old place, just as naturally as if he had never left it.

He had spent the four years of the war down in Texas, far away from all knowledge of the hostile scenes, and it was only by accident that he had heard of the termination of the struggle.

Five or six feet from Gol—who was crouched down on the grass, playing with his pet squirrel, one of the black Mexican breed that he had brought with him from Texas—sitting on a log, was the German, Peter Ritter—or, as more generally termed, Dutch Pete. He was a flaxen-haired, blue-eyed youth, apparently not over eighteen, but well and stoutly built, after the universal fashion of his healthy countrymen.

Tramping through the country, he had sought shelter, one night, at Adair's cabin, and the two, getting into conversation after supper, smoking their pipes together before the huge log fire, took quite an interest in each other.

The old hunter, Gol Adair, who for years had avoided the society of his fellow-men, took a strange fancy to the simple German lad who was without either parents or friends.

Adair noticed the repeating rifle, Colt's patent, that the youth carried, and shrewdly suspected from that that the boy had been a soldier in the Union army, although of course it was natural that he should wish to keep that fact to himself, for at that time a good deal of the bitterness of the war still remained in that section.

And in the morning, the old hunter proposed to the lad to stay with him, unless he thought he could better himself by going further on.

The lad eagerly accepted the offer, and from that day forth had made his home with Adair. He assisted the old man in the cotton-field, and was his constant companion in the hunt.

A strange bond of sympathy existed between the two—the childless, solitary old hunter, and the young, fresh boy, just at life's threshold, but friendless and alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LOVERS.

"I RECKON I'll have to go up to the landing and git some tobaccy," Adair said, as he examined the huge tin box in which he carried his supply of the fragrant weed; "I kinder reckon I kin swap off a pair of these ducks for what tobaccy I want, an' not get cheated much, either. Sent, you rascal! Consarn yer, you put y'ur teeth clean into my thumb!" This last remark was addressed to the squirrel which had taken advantage of Adair's inattention, to give him a good sharp nip on the finger.

"I go to the landing mit you," said Pete, who spoke with a strong German accent.

"What do you want up to the landing, hey?" questioned Adair; "you ain't out of tobaccy, too?"

"Nein, I have plenty—much," and he blushed up to his eyes as he spoke.

Gol took a good look at him with his keen little eyes, and then he puckered up the corners of his mouth in a peculiar manner.

"Wal—all right; we'll go up together; p'haps you kin swap off your ducks for what you want," Gol suggested, innocently, but there was a merry twinkle in his eyes as he spoke.

The lad shook his head.

"Nein," he replied, laconically.

Winnie was stretched out at full length on the green sward, resting his head on his hand, his shot-gun lying by his side. He was paying no heed to the conversation, but was idly pulling the blades of grass to pieces, evidently deep in meditation.

Gol glanced from the lad to the young soldier, a comical grin upon his dried-up features.

"They've both on 'em got it bad," he muttered, in an undertone. "I s'pose it's in the natur' of humans to have it while they're young, jist as puppies catch the distemper. It don't kill quite so many two-legged critters, though. I say, boys!" he cried, abruptly, raising his voice to attract the attention of the two, "what do you say to try fur a deer to-night with a torch? I've got some splendid chocks of fat-wood."

"All right; where will you go?" Winnie asked.

"'Bout six miles up the bayou, the other side of Black-Jack Swamp. We'll start about six to-night." And then the eyes of the old hunter twinkled.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Winnie, suddenly. "I can't go as early as that."

"Nein, neither can I," Peter said, getting very red in the face again. "I cannot go mit you so early as dat."

"Why, what on airth is the matter with both on you?" asked Gol, in affected amazement.

"I have an appointment this evening," the lieutenant explained.

"Dat ish the matter mit me," the German lad confessed, still very red in the face.

"Get him to wait till to-morrow," Gol suggested, very innocently, addressing the soldier; "and won't the gentleman wait for you, Peter?" he demanded of the boy.

"You infernal old humbug! You know very well that it isn't a him!" Winnie exclaimed.

"And is your him a fraulin' too?" Gol asked, of the boy, comically imitating his tone.

"Yah," replied the youth, laconically.

"Wal, go it, ye cripples!" the hunter said, encouragingly. "I'll hold yer hats. I reckon, though, that you can't swap the ducks off for ribbons and sich truck, but maybe ef you let me hev the trade I kin. I 'low I kin whip the world a-swappin'. But what time will you be back, leftenant?"

"Not before ten; I sha'n't go up to the landing until after dark. I don't care about the whole town seeing me call upon the lady," Winnie explained.

"Kinder ashamed of her, I s'pose," Gol said, sympathizingly.

"Go to thunder!" the soldier responded, indignantly.

"I sw'ar I won't waste any more sympathy on you, dog-gone you!" retorted Gol. "And Pete, when air you coming home?"

"When she turn me out," the boy replied, honestly.

Both Gol Adair and Winnie laughed at the frank confession.

"Wal—I sw'ar!" Gol exclaimed, after he got through laughing. "I never had to be turned out by the gal when I used to go sparkin'. I allers could take a hint. All they had to do was to boot me out two or three times, and then I allers understood that my company wasn't agreeable." And the old hunter laid back and enjoyed a quiet laugh.

"Well, as we're all three going up to the landing, let us go together about sundown," Winnie suggested.

"I'm yer man, as the beaver said when he married the muskrat's sister," was the hunter's reply. "I say, leftenant, who do you suppose this critter is hankering arter?"

"I haven't an idea," Winnie replied.

"Tilda Ozark, sister-in-law to Yell."

"Whew!" exclaimed Winnie, in surprise. "You had better be careful, Pete; if you should happen to offend that precious brother-in-law, he'd think nothing of putting a load of buckshot 'plum into you,' as he would say."

The lad raised his head proudly and a spark of fire shone in his clear blue eyes.

"Me nix 'fraid!" and he drew the rifle up and pulled the hammer back with his thumb significantly as he spoke. "Me see men shot 'fore now: dat ish good. I hit dat squir-

rel 'way up on tree. I gife Yell one, two, six bullets, he come mit me near."

"He won't give you a fair chance for your life, boy," Gol said, kindly and quite gravely. "He'll bushwhack you from behind a tree or from a fence corner, the everlasting polecat that he is!"

"Why, do you think that there is any real danger of his attacking Pete?" the soldier asked.

"Wal, I dunno," Adair said, with a dubious shake of the head. "Just afore he shot Tom Warren, and the chase wasn't so hot arter him, he used to come in nigh the landing. I s'pose I've seen him skulkin' in the bush down near the Ozark place a dozen times. That's about two miles down the river. Tilda lives thar with her father and mother; Forsyth's their name. I had a talk with ole man Forsyth then, about Yell; I happened to mention that I see'd him, an' the ole cuss r'ally trembled; shook jist as if the ague had got hold on him. I asked him right out if he was 'feared of Yell, and he 'lowed he was. He tole me that Yell had bin hangin' round the plantation a good deal, and he r'ally feared that he was coming arter Tilda. Of course the ole man knew that I wouldn't mention anything 'bout seein' Yell, 'cos he knew that I allers 'tended strickly to my own business, an' knew 'nough to keep my mouth shet."

"I say, Gol, why the deuce is it that you're so reluctant to give us a clue to the hiding-place of this fellow? You know where his hole is in the swamp, and you would really be doing a service to the community to tell. I can understand in war-time how such a fellow's brutal acts could be tolerated, but now he's a perfect terror," Winnie said, earnestly.

"Wal, you're 'bout right, I s'pose," Adair answered, thoughtfully. "That poor Tom Warren that he shot was a right proper sort of man, but I don't want to be mixed up in it all. It's none of my quarrel, as the 'coon said when he clim' up the gum an' left the wild-cat and the black snake to fight it out on the ground."

"Why didn't old Forsyth tell him to clear out and let his daughter alone? After killing one of the girls, Ozark ought to be satisfied."

The ole man didn't dar' to open his head to him fur fear he'd lay fur him with the double-barrel some night."

"Then you won't tell me where his den in the swamp is?"

"I sw'ar I don't know, r'ally," replied Gol, earnestly. "I suppose I could smell him out ef I wanted to, but I don't."

"After he's riddled the boy yonder with buckshot, you'll be sorry you didn't put your heel on this snake," Winnie said.

Gol looked after Pete, who had risen during the conversation and walked toward the house.

"He'd better not tech him!" the old hunter exclaimed, nervously. "It will be the worst day's work Yell Ozark ever did ef he pulls a trigger on that air boy, I tell yer!"

CHAPTER XV.

JUDGE YELL.

Just before the little party, consisting of the General, the sheriff, and the overseer, got to Smithville, a man came riding out of a gateway by the side of the road and headed toward the town.

This man was short in stature, and decidedly fleshy in build; he had a round, flat face, as rosy and chubby as the face of a ten-year old school-boy; it was smoothly shaven, and a pair of little blue eyes peeped out from the huge wrinkles of flesh which seemed likely some day to close the said eyes up altogether. On his head he wore a glossy brown wig, elaborately curled. This could hardly be termed a deception; that it was a wig was clearly evident upon the slightest inspection. A broad-brimmed straw hat shaded his eyes, and he wore a frock-coat and a pair of black doe-skin pantaloons that had evidently seen a great deal of service. Both coat and pantaloons were extremely loose and baggy in their fit. He wore no vest, and his shirt was open at the throat, innocent of collar or necktie. He was mounted on a large gray mule, and held a large, dingy, cotton umbrella over his head to keep off the rays of the sun.

This was the very gentleman that General Smith had spoken of, Judge Jack Yell—reputed to be as excellent a

lawyer, as fine a poker-player, and as good a judge of whisky as dwelt west of the Mississippi river.

The Judge was about fifty years of age, and had really retired from practice, although once in a while he would undertake a case, simply to oblige a friend, and just to keep his hand in, as he expressed it.

"Thar's the Jedge now," the sheriff said.

"Let us push on and overtake him," Smith suggested.

The clatter of hoofs behind him caught the Judge's attention, and he turned in the saddle to see who it was. Recognizing the General, he checked his mule and halted until the others came up with him.

"Good-evening, Judge," Smith exclaimed, shaking hands with Yell, as they rode on side by side. In the South the afternoon is generally termed "evening."

"How'y do, how'y do, Ginerall?" the Judge said; he spoke with a very strong South-western accent.

"Going to the landing?"

"Yes, I reckon so; I heerd a boat whistle 'bout an hour back, and it immediately devolved upon my comprehension that thar was a mail steamer that had arrived." The Judge was noted for using uncommon words and phrases, which he did with such perfect gravity, that half the time even his most intimate friends couldn't tell whether he was joking or in sober earnest.

"It must be the Dardanelles," the General said; "she was lying at the Rock when I left."

"I opine that your prognostication is not six degrees windward of the truth," remarked the Judge. "How are you, Johnson? How is Mrs. Johnson and all the leetle Johnsons?" he queried of the sheriff.

"Finely, thank you," replied the sheriff, grinning at the gravity of the Judge's manner.

"See hyer, Judge, we want you in a little law case. My overseer hyer—Mr. Texas, Judge Yell."

The overseer bowed, while the Judge saluted by whirling his umbrella in the air, thereby starting the sheriff's horse, so that the brute gave a sudden "back" jump which pretty near sent Mr. Johnson on his head.

"Whoa! you durned brute!" cried the sheriff, as soon as he recovered his breath, which had been pretty nearly all jerked out of him by the sudden jump of his beast. "See hyer, Jedge, for heaven's sake, shet up that air umbrella or keep it quiet. You'll have me over the beast's neck, furst thing you know, and I've got a wife and family."

The Judge looked at the sheriff for a moment, an expression of grave astonishment upon his flat face.

"Johnson," he said, slowly; "you are a pretty good man, but you'd never do for a hoss-thief. You can't ride," and then the Judge sighed, as if sorely grieved.

"The blazes I can't!" growled the sheriff, in disgust. "I never was throw'd yit. I'd like to see the hoss that could—"

But Mr. Johnson didn't proceed any further in his speech, for the Judge just at that moment gave a yell that would have done credit to a Choctaw Indian, and waved the umbrella wildly in the air; as a natural consequence, the sheriff's horse, restive and fractious under the heavy hand of his master, started up the road, plunging, kicking and rearing, and the sheriff, cursing the Judge, the horse, and the umbrella all together, rode all over the animal from his head to his tail; but by a miracle almost he managed to cling to the horse and escape being thrown.

The Judge indulged in a quiet chuckle as he watched the remarkable equestrian performance. Then he turned to the General as gravely as if nothing had happened.

"What is the nature of the case?" he asked.

The three horsemen were riding slowly along together, while the sheriff, after calming his animal, was keeping well in the advance, out of the way of the Judge's practical jokes.

"An assault and battery case. Mr. Texas here was over-seeing the hands in the field when that black scoundrel, King Congo— You know the nig, Judge?"

The Judge nodded.

"Well, he came up and interfered with the hands, telling them to quit work, and then gave Mr. Texas here some of his talk, and he just went in and whaled the darky till he couldn't stand. It was the prettiest fight, Judge, that you ever saw. Mr. Texas here closed up both the nig's eyes and then give him a clean lick in the bread-basket that knocked him smack out of time. Why, when it struck, it sounded like a tall cottonwood cracking!"

"I can't take the case, sir!" exclaimed the Judge, de-

cidedly. "I am an old man, General Smith; I have been your neighbor since we were both knee-high to a woodchuck, and you have grossly insulted me! You have lacerated my heart in its inmost interstices! Only a mile away and never send for me to witness such a fight! General, it will take four fingers of whisky to 'make me forget such an outrage!"

Then the General, who at first had listened in astonishment, suddenly perceived that the Judge was joking as usual.

"Why, it didn't last five minutes; he whipped Congo senseless inside of that time," Smith explained. "Well, the black was carried off by his friends, and of course I naturally supposed that the affair was ended, but the first thing after dinner the sheriff rides up—"

"On a fiery steed of the Ukraine breed!" the Judge quoted, gravely, "Byron improved!"

"Yes; and said that he has a warrant for Mr. Texas' arrest; charge, assault and battery, preferred by King Congo. They mean business, too, Judge; they've got Bob Howard on their side."

By this time they had got fairly into the town.

"Bob's a pretty smart young man," the Judge said, slowly; "he has the making of a good lawyer ef he'd only let whisky alone. Ah, General Smith! it grieves me to the soul when I see these young men, the rising flower of our country, depend upon vile liquor to stimulate their brains. What says Shakspeare, that giant mind that hath written of all things, and of all things equally well? 'Oh, thou invisible spirit of wine; if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil! Oh, that men should put an enemy in their mouth to steal away their brains! The Judge had halted, and, dropping the reins of his mule, had canted the umbrella back over his shoulder, while, with his right fore-finger upraised, he shook it in the air as if addressing a jury. The other two had also stopped their horses. They had halted directly in front of the Planter's Saloon.

"And, General, speaking in this vein also, do you remember the remarkable words of the Ghost of Pocos?"

"No, I don't think that I ever heard that," Smith replied, thoughtfully.

"'Twas in our Mexican campaign; our regiment was quartered in an old, half-ruined tower on the outskirts of Monterey, just after the fall of that city. The tower was haunted by a ghastly ghost, all clad in white. It was supposed to be the spirit of the former owner of the tower, who was murdered by a jealous rival at a grand banquet, just as he had risen to speak, with a goblet of wine in his hand. The ghost was troubled; 'rest, perturbed spirit,' he would not. He had some dead secret weighing on his mind which he must give to the world ere his bones could 'lie in the earth.' No Mexican dared to listen to the fearful story the lips of the specter must speak. And the first night we lay within the ruined tower the ghost came. I and a comrade, a warm-hearted Irishman, followed him. Through many a winding passage he went, until at last, in the charnel vault beneath the tower, where the whitening bones lay thick, the specter spoke. Short the sentence; nor earth nor heaven could gainsay the truth. He said—and it will ring in my ears 'to the last syllable of recorded time'—'It's a long while 'tween drinks.'"

"Sold, by thunder!" muttered the General, while Texas roared.

"Come, 'light down, gentlemen, and try some whisky with me," the Judge said, dismounting; then he shouted to the sheriff, who, glancing round, perceived that the party had halted; so he also reined in his steed.

"Oh, Mister Johnson, will you come and astonish your stomach with some good whisky, and yourself by drinking in the company of gentlemen?" the Judge shouted.

"I won't come a durned foot till you shet up that dog-goned umbrella," the sheriff replied, defiantly. "I ain't a-gwine through the city with my hoss a-trying to walk on his hind-legs, like a blamed circus-rider!"

Gravely the Judge shut up the umbrella, then performed a military salute with it.

The sheriff rode up and dismounted. The party all "took a drink," mounted their horses again, and proceeded straight to the court-room, where all was in readiness for the trial.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ARKANSAS JUSTICE.

THE Judge, yielding to Johnson's persuasions, had not reopened the umbrella, but had tucked it under his arm, although he solemnly declared that he should get sunburnt and spoil the freshness of his complexion, and then none of the girls would love him. Which, considering that the Judge had already had three wives, and "raised" three separate families, amounting in round numbers to about sixteen, was something really alarming.

"Who is the case brought before?" the Judge inquired.

"Foxcroft; ycu know he was elected last election," the sheriff replied.

"Ah, yes. I don't know much about the gentleman," the Judge said. "What sort of a justice does he make?"

"I reckon I don't know," the sheriff answered; "this hyer is the fust case that has come afore him."

"He's not a lawyer, is he?"

"No, I reckon not; I never heered that he was."

The Judge caressed his fat chin for a moment, then broke out into a series of short, dry chuckles.

The sheriff, in alarm, clutched his horse's rein tighter and cast a wary glance at the umbrella. He expected another practical joke, which, Yell noticing, he laughed quietly.

"Don't be skeered, Mister Johnson," he said. "I am perfectly satisfied now that you can ride. In fact, you can do more riding in the same space than any other man that I have ever seen. Most horsemen content themselves with riding on the saddle, but you excel them; you ride all over the animal, from the ears to the tail."

All this was said so gravely that the sheriff thought at first the Judge intended to compliment him, but the suppressed mirth of the General and Texas soon convinced him that the Judge was making fun of him.

"Wal, I didn't fall off, anyway," he muttered to himself, contenting himself with that reflection.

"I say, Judge, what can they do in this case, anyway?" the General asked.

"Oh, not much of any thing. I don't really understand what they want. Congo of course will swear that Mr. Texas here struck him without any provocation, and—by the way, who witnessed the affair?"

"No one but the field hands and two or three darkies that came with Congo. I didn't see the first of it," the General said.

"He brought some other blacks with him, did he, on your place, eh?" the Judge asked, thoughtfully.

"Yes."

"It looks as if he came for the express purpose of picking a fuss, and brought his witnesses along with him," the Judge said, shrewdly.

"That's just what I thought," the General said.

"A case of simple assault generally amounts to a fine of five dollars or so, but in this case, the complainant being a black, they may make an effort to twist it round as an outrage upon the Freedmen collectively; that is, that the black would not have been assaulted if he had been a white man. You see the law is a very curious thing, sometimes; it beats an eel for twisting, all hollow. But, General, you ought to have brought your witnesses along."

"They're coming; I thought of that," the General replied. "I told Sam to pick out three of the most intelligent of the hands who witnessed the affair, and start 'em in to the landing. They'll be along soon."

By this time the party had reached Foxcroft's store. The Temple of Justice represented by the office of the Justice of the Peace, was situated over the store, and was a medium-sized room, about twelve by fifteen. The accommodations were limited; a couple of pine tables, one large and the other small; four or five chairs, a small, high desk, a high stool, and a long bench, comprised the furniture.

When the little party entered the room, they found Foxcroft perched up on a high stool behind the desk, diligently engaged in a perusal of Wells' "Every man his Own Lawler," being the only law book that he had been able to procure in town.

Bob Howard, the lawyer, was seated at the table nearest the window, with his feet comfortably adjusted upon it, smoking a cigar.

Howard was a young man of twenty-five or six, about medium size, with a thin face, keen gray eyes, and hair that curled in little fiery red ringlets all over his head, with the exception of the extreme top of his pate, which was com-

pletely bald. A thin and scraggy mustache of the same fiery hue as his curly locks graced his upper lip.

Bob was the only son of a wealthy planter, who had been pretty well to do in the world, but since his father's death the devil-may-care young lawyer had made ducks and drakes of his paternal acres.

King Congo, with his head all bound up, was stretched out at full length on the bench, surrounded by a group of negroes.

Foxcroft looked a little astonished when he saw that Judge Yell was a member of the party. He was not acquainted with the Judge personally, but of course was well acquainted with him by reputation.

"Mr. Texas, Justice Foxcroft," said the sheriff, introducing the overseer.

"Hello, Judge!" exclaimed Howard, in astonishment, jumping up and advancing to Yell. "Why, what brought you to town?"

"Mr. Howard, I am really delighted," replied the Judge, taking the hand of the young lawyer with stately politeness. "I have the honor to represent my esteemed friend hyer, Mr. Texas, in this case, and I can hardly express my feelings of delight that I am permitted to appear before the bar of justice presided over by the learned and profound gentleman who now sits yonder, but with whom I have not the pleasure of being acquainted." And here the Judge bowed gravely to Foxcroft, who felt extremely flattered by the compliment, while Bob Howard had to turn away and stuff his handkerchief in his mouth to keep from snickering in the face of the "learned Justice." Knowing Judge Yell so thoroughly, and his contempt for storekeeper-justices, he understood that the old lawyer was in reality poking fun at the court.

"Blamed if I didn't think you knew the Justice!" Mr. Johnson exclaimed, annoyed at having been so forgetful of the necessary etiquette, as not to introduce the Judge to the Justice. He repaired the blunder at once.

"Judge Yell, Justice Foxcroft."

The Judge shook hands with Foxcroft, and in his stately and dignified way lamented that he had never had the pleasure of meeting him before, and wound up by borrowing a "chew tobacco" from him. Foxcroft expressed his delight at being able to accommodate the Judge.

Then a sudden thought appeared to strike Yell. He looked around him reflectively; tapped his forehead with his forefinger for a minute, then crossed the room to Howard, and took him to one corner and conversed with him there, mysteriously, for a few minutes, to the great wonderment and awe of nearly all within the room.

But though the face of the Judge was as sober as a mourner at a funeral, the communication which he delivered to Howard made that lively young man red in the face with suppressed laughter, and it was only by a great effort that he refrained from a most unseemly outburst of merriment.

Then the Judge looked around, smiled blandly, and crossing to the table opposite to the one occupied by Howard, laid his hat and umbrella upon it, and sat down quietly.

Just at this moment Sam and three field-hands whom he had selected, came rushing in, puffing and blowing like a lot of porpoises. It was clear that they had run all the way to town.

"We done got hyer, sur," Sam said, addressing the General, who motioned the hands to stand over by the wall, back of the table occupied by Judge Yell.

Foxcroft was not at all pleased with the appearance of the Judge and General in the overseer-case. The first he knew to be a lawyer, second to none in the State of Arkansas—or for that matter, in the whole Southern country, and the General was one of the most prominent citizens for miles around, and he foresaw that there might be trouble in carrying out the little scheme that had been concocted to worry The-Man-from-Texas.

And as for King Congo and his black friends, they looked both disgusted and frightened at Judge Yell's interference. The Judge was something of a mystery to the colored folks generally; his absurd practical jokes had caused the greater part of them to look upon the Judge as being a little crazy at times.

CHAPTER XVII.

TRYING THE CASE.

FOXcroft had not been able to extract much information bearing upon the present case from the pages of "Every Man His Own Lawyer," but he had opened it at "Miscellaneous Information," trusting that that might aid him if any knotty point of law should arise during the case. He had, however, made up his mind not to expose his ignorance, but to let the two lawyers fight the case out. He felt sure of one thing, and that was that the overseer had whipped the darky, and that Congo could easily prove it, and, of course, under the laws of the State, he had a perfect right to fine the guilty party, although he was not sure how high a fine the law would justify him in inflicting; but, as he had told Fayette, he thought the law could be stretched a little.

"Order in the court!" yelled Johnson, understanding from Foxcroft's manner that he was ready to hear the case.

Howard got up.

"Your honor, I rise to address you in a most important case. The dignity and peace of the State of Arkansas have been violated by the prisoner at the bar—I say, Johnson, old fellow, this is simply shameful, you know! What have I done to you that I should be treated in this manner?" Howard cried, suddenly breaking off from the topic of his speech and appealing to the sheriff in an excited manner. "You haven't introduced me to this gentleman yet!" and he pointed to Texas.

Johnson was in despair.

"I sw'ar, Bob, I clean forgot it!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Texas, Mr. Howard."

Then the lawyer advanced, shook hands politely with the overseer, who had been accommodated with a chair near Yell's table, proffered him a "chew" from his tobacco-box, and, on its being declined with thanks, retreated to his table and went on with his argument.

"Yes, your Honor, the prisoner at the bar, in defiance of the laws of Arkansas and the statutes in such case made and provided, has committed a deadly assault upon one of our most respected citizens, K. Congo, Esq., whereby the life of that eminent and distinguished citizen has been brought in peril and he has suffered great bodily damage. Far be it from me to wish to soar on the eagle-wing of oratory in this case. I will rest it upon the solid facts which we have the witnesses here to prove. Sheriff, call James Snow." Howard referred to a little memorandum which he held in his hand as he spoke.

One of the three darkies who were standing by Congo advanced to the open space between the Judge's desk and the table of Yell, where the sheriff was standing.

Old Uncle Snow, as he was generally called, was a noted character in Smithville. He had formerly been one of General Smith's slaves, but, during the last of the war, he had started a little store on the outskirts of the town, and was reputed to be doing very well.

The old negro was generally liked. When Smith had returned at the end of the war, "Uncle" had offered to come back to the plantation and help his old master along, but the General told the old fellow that he had better stick to his store.

And when the old darky took the stand, all within the room knew that he would tell nothing but the truth.

He kissed the "book" with great solemnity, evidently deeply impressed with his position as witness.

"Now, Uncle Snow, mind, we require you to tell all you know in regard to this affair," Howard said, gravely.

"Yes, sar," replied the white-haired negro; "'fore de Lord, I won't tell nuffin' else, sure's you're born, Massa Howard."

"Go ahead, then."

"I was a-comin' along de road by Massa Smith's plantation an' I met Congo an' dem oder nigs dere; an' Congo asked me to gwine wid him a bit. An' I did. Den he an' de overseer had a fuss, an' dat gemman dere he fotched Congo de awfulest lick dat I ever see'd struck. Den Congo he girded up his lions fur to sail in, an' den dat gemman fotched him anoder lick, wuss dan de furst; den he smashed him five or six licks in de face ag'in, so quick you couldn't see dem, an' den he fotched him a wallop ag'in de body dat made Congo's ribs crack for sure. An' dat's all I know 'bout it."

"A plain, straightforward story, your Honor," Howard said. "Now, Uncle, who struck the first blow?"

"Dat gemman, sar," and the negro pointed to Texas, "but Congo sarsed him an' made fur to fotch him a lick."

"Did Congo strike at him?"

"No, sar; 'fore de Lord, he didn't git de chance."

"That will do," Howard said, and the negro retired.

The other two blacks were examined, and they told about the same story as Uncle Snow, except that they stoutly denied that Congo had either "sarsed" the overseer or had threatened to strike him.

"The witnesses are yours, Judge," Howard said, bowing gracefully to Yell.

The Judge recalled the old negro.

"Now, then, on your oath, did you see the prisoner strike the negro with malice aforethought?" cried Yell, in a voice of thunder, shaking his forefinger in the face of the witness.

"No, sar, I didn't see it!" cried the old negro, hurriedly.

"Dat gemman didn't strike him wid a malice—he stru'k him wid his han'; dere wasn't nuffin' in it."

"No, you misunderstand the Judge," Howard said; "he means did he strike him with malice prepense."

Old Uncle Snow was bothered; he scratched his head for a moment, then answered, slowly:

"No, sar, I didn't see any prepense in his hand either; he hit him wid his fist, jist his bar' han', sar."

"This is infamous!" cried Yell, in sudden indignation.

"Your Honor, I appeal to you! Is the witness to be badgered by the opposing counsel in this manner? It is disgraceful! An insult to you, Justice, and also to me. In thirty years' practice I have never known such a thing. If my learned brother thinks that he can ride over me because I am an old man, I tell him right hyer to his teeth that it can't be done. I am not to be browbeaten; I am not to be put down. I know my rights, and knowing dare maintain!" and the Judge banged his fist down upon the table with a force which shook the whole room.

Howard was on his feet in an instant.

"I hurl back the insults of Judge Yell with scorn and contempt. A relic of the past, he can not understand the spirit of our age!" howled Howard, at the top of his voice, also banging the table with his fist.

"Does my young and learned brother dare to reflect upon my age?" yelled the Judge, brandishing his clenched fist wildly in the air.

The spectators began to be alarmed; none within the room had ever seen the Judge so fearfully excited before, and Bob Howard, too, seemed not a whit behind. Johnson, the sheriff, prepared himself to jump in between the two excited men; he saw that there was likely to be a fuss.

"That the esteemed and venerable counsel on the other side is in his dotage is plain!" cried Howard, doubling up his fist and shaking it menacingly at the other.

"Oh, that I should ever live to be insulted by this miserable scalawag!" groaned Yell.

"Who's a scalawag?"

"You are!"

"It is false!"

"Defend yourself!"

The Judge grabbed the big ink-stand on his table and shied it at Howard's head; he dodged, and the missile went smash through the window. Then Howard seized a chair and raised it as if to strike the Judge, whereupon Yell seized the umbrella that lay before him on the table, and swinging it round wildly in the air, took Johnson, who was advancing to interfere, an awful lick in the nose, tumbling him over on top of Congo and in among the witnesses who were all huddled together in the corner, and the result was, that the party all went over in a heap together.

Then Howard, dropping his chair and the Judge his umbrella, rushed together and clinched in the center of the room, then the Judge threw Howard a "dog fall," and they rolled over on the floor in a desperate encounter.

It took Smith, Texas, the sheriff, two or three of the negroes, and even the learned Justice from the bench himself, to separate the combatants.

Such an uproar had not been heard in Smithville for many a long day, and the news that there was a fight going on over Foxcroft's store, attracted a big crowd on the stairs and outside the building.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JUDGMENT.

HOWARD and the Judge were separated, and each resumed his former seat. Strange to say, neither one of them had received any damage, except that the Judge's wig had come off during the skirmish.

Foxcroft took his seat upon the "bench" again with a solemn face. He had often heard of the peculiar customs of some of the Far Western courts, but the sample that he had just witnessed rather astonished him, and, to crown his amazement, as soon as the Judge recovered his breath, he proceeded in the examination of the witness just as if nothing unusual had occurred.

The sheriff, Johnson, and the battered-up Congo, had been the only sufferers in the affray.

Johnson had a pair of beautiful black eyes and a swelled nose, produced by contact with the Judge's umbrella, and Congo had had all his wounds reopened afresh by Johnson's bouncing down on him with the force of a battering-ram.

Johnson was mad; his eyes and nose hurt. He couldn't very well call the Judge to account, for the lick was accidental, but his glance fell upon the crowd pressing in the doorway; here was a chance for him to let off a little surplus steam, so he immediately proceeded to drive the crowd out of the entry, an operation which was by no means agreeable to the members of the aforesaid crowd, and they plainly intimated to Johnson that they considered that he was putting on frills; whereupon Johnson, wounded both in feeling and in person, but still remembering his oath of office as sheriff, and knowing that it was not right to kick up a disturbance and annoy the court, succeeded in getting the crowd out of the doorway, so that he could close the door, and in the passage proceeded to "interview" the man who had insinuated that he was indulging in "frills."

"What part of the body did Congo strike Mr. Texas, when he hit him before Mr. Texas hit him?" the Judge said, sternly.

The negro was bothered.

"I dunno, Massa Judge; I didn't see him fotch him a lick at all."

"Why, did I not understand you to say that Congo raised his arm and struck Mr. Texas?"

"I didn't see'd him hit him; he raised his arm, dat's all."

"Possibly you turned away your head?" the Judge said, insinuatingly.

"I dunno, sar." The black was perplexed; he was trying to recall the whole affair, and the more he thought about it the more uncertain he became.

"Now, on your oath!" thundered the Judge, "can you swear that you did not turn your eyes for a second while Congo struck Mr. Texas? Remember you are on your oath, sir," and the Judge, leaning over the table, shook that awful forefinger solemnly in Uncle Snow's face.

"I mought 'a' winked, Massa, an' den he hit him an' I didn't see'd it," the old negro said, slowly.

Biff—bang! from the entry; smash! open came the door, disclosing a free fight in the entry with Johnson, the sheriff, revolving around in the center of it. He was getting satisfaction for his black eyes.

Justice, council, witnesses and prisoner—all made a rush to assist Mr. Johnson.

The reinforcements proved too much for the intruders, and one grand charge drove them down the stairs into the street.

Then the victors returned again to the court-room. Johnson was as proud as a peacock with two tails.

"I reckon that thar's one man in this hyer city that won't say I put on frills ag'in!" he muttered, now perfectly satisfied.

The Judge "went for" the other witnesses, and succeeded in mixing their statements up so that when he got through with them they were ready to swear to almost any thing.

Then he brought up the three field-hands. They had listened to the evidence and were perfectly satisfied that they had seen Congo strike the overseer first, and swore to it like men and heroes.

Then Bob Howard took them in hand and put them through a cross-examination, and by the time he got through they had testified that Congo had struck the overseer a half dozen times at the least before the overseer had retaliated.

Of course by this time the affair had got pretty well muddled up.

Howard courteously gave the Judge the privilege of "summing up" last and went ahead.

"Your Honor, the case is as clear as the waters of the Arkansas!" The Justice reflected just then that the water of the Arkansas wasn't very clear about that time. "I think that we have fully proved the assault by competent witnesses, and the clear and straightforward manner in which they have testified is worthy of the highest praise."

Here the negroes looked at each other and scratched their heads in wonder. They were laboring under the impression that they didn't know much about the affair, anyway.

"I move for sentence, and that it shall be so heavy as to strike terror to the soul of the dastardly perpetrator as well as to the heart of the ghoul-like lawyer who dares to come into this court and attempt to defend such a fiendish outrage."

"Ghoul is too much!" yelled the Judge, rising in rage. "I'm your man, Bob Howard!"

Then, with a wild war-whoop, the Judge attempted to spring upon his opponent, but Smith and Texas grabbed him by the coat-tails, and as the cloth was good his hostile design was baffled.

Howard had leaped up about three feet in the air and responded with a yell equally as fierce, but the sheriff had thrown both arms around him and held on for dear life.

The eager crowd in the street once more rushed up-stairs. The court of Justice Foxcroft beat a circus all hollow that day.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen! for Heaven's sake, calm yourselves; respect the dignity of the court!" Foxcroft cried, in alarm, looking over his desk at the struggling men, panting like wild beasts to get at each other.

Like oil upon troubled waters was the speech of the Justice. In a second the raging lions became as turtle-doves; they retreated to their table and bowed with humble respect to the Justice.

He could hardly believe his eyes. He could make neither head nor tail of these astonishing transactions.

Yell sat down and Howard went on in his speech.

"I submit the case," he said, "without further argument. Words are useless when facts are so clear." Then he bowed to the Justice and turned to the Judge. "I yield now to my learned and esteemed friend, Judge Yell." Howard bowed gracefully to the Judge and sat down. Yell returned the bow and got up.

"As my young and estimable brother in the law, Mr. Howard, has remarked," then he bowed to Howard, and that gentleman, rising for a moment, returned it with great ceremony, "the facts in the case are clear. The complainant goes upon the grounds of my esteemed friend, General Smith, without leave or license, thereby committing a trespass. When warned to go, he refuses. He uses words calculated to create trouble among the laborers of General Smith, thereby exciting a riot. He uses blasphemous words breaking the statute framed against the use of oaths thereby. He raises his arm to strike, or does strike General Smith's overseer—the intent is enough, although we clearly prove the blow—and he, believing his life to be in danger, used gentle force—as these intelligent witnesses have fully testified," and he waved his hand toward Smith's three field-hands, who grinned at the compliment. "And then the complainant, with designed malice, throws himself backward on the ground and with his head and shoulders plows a ridge in it a foot long and at least six inches deep, as has been sworn to under oath. If a person puts a fence on, or plows the land of another, he is liable for trespass, whether the owner has sustained injury or not. You'll find it in Wells' book, page 291, fourth paragraph," he said to the Justice. Yell's memory was something wonderful. "If the General takes my advice, he will at once commence a suit against the complainant in this case. He has good grounds. Any jury in the world could have but one opinion on this subject. But I see that I need speak no more; your intelligent mind must see the issue as it is, stripped of all disguises. The right of self-defense—of the subject to bear arms and to use them—is now on trial. I cannot doubt what your decision will be; the Latin of Horace covers it, *Ex nihilo nihil fit*," (nothing comes of nothing).

Foxcroft did not understand Latin, and bowed graciously at what he supposed was a compliment, while Howard was stifling with suppressed laughter.

"I find the prisoner guilty, and sentence him to pay a fine of two hundred dollars."

CHAPTER XIX.

SHARP PRACTICE.

THERE was a general murmur of astonishment in the court-room at the sentence of the Justice.

Two hundred dollars was an outrageous fine for a simple assault, even if the blame in the affair had been all on one side.

Howard rose to his feet. It was evident from his face that he was about to say something in regard to the sentence, possibly instruct the Justice that nowhere in the law could he find authority for inflicting such a heavy fine.

But, just as the young lawyer opened his mouth to speak, Judge Yell gave a short, dry cough, and winked at him significantly with his left eye.

Howard was quick to take a hint, so he contented himself with bowing politely to the Justice, as if to express his satisfaction with the sentence and as if he had risen for that purpose alone. Then he sat down.

Judge Yell got upon his feet very slowly.

He bowed with dignity to the Justice.

"Your Honor," he said, smiling blandly, "while I must express my astonishment that your able mind, with its profound and august store of legal learning, would become convinced of the guilt of the defendant in this case, wherein trembles in the balance the welfare of the citizens of this great and glorious State of Arkansas, still I am sure that your cognizance has discovered some important issue in the case aforesaid which has escaped my humble notice; I therefore take this occasion on behalf of my client to express to you my sincere thanks that you have dealt so tenderly and gently in this case and levied so low a fine as two hundred dollars, when, with your knowledge of the statutes in such cases made and provided, you might with equal justice have fined him five hundred dollars. But after such a fine, one learned in the law can not help applying to your Honor the line that Æneas spoke when last he saw Queen Dido: '*Vox et preterea nihil!*'" (*A voice and nothing more.*)

Foxcroft bowed; he hadn't the slightest knowledge of Latin, and from the grave dignity of the Judge, imagined himself highly complimented.

But Howard, who understood the verse, only saved himself from a violent burst of laughter by going into a tremendous fit of coughing.

Then the Judge went on again.

"And, your Honor, I have but one request to make, and that is, that you will suspend the execution of the sentence for ten minutes while I retire for the necessary papers."

Foxcroft hadn't the remotest idea what the Judge wanted with "papers," as the case was settled; but, supposing it to be some legal form, he, with a look of profound wisdom, replied that it gave him a great deal of pleasure to be able to comply with any wish of the Judge.

Yell bowed, murmured his thanks and withdrew; first whispering to the General to follow.

Howard wondered what the old fellow was up to now, while the sheriff, Johnson, confidentially informed the Justice that he "reckoned the old cuss was dry," and had gone out to "wood-up."

In about three minutes a young negro came in with a message for the sheriff, and that officer informed the Justice that he'd "be back in a minute," then followed the boy out.

Five—ten minutes more passed away and neither the Judge nor Johnson returned.

Foxcroft began to be impatient, and finally after about half an hour had elapsed and the twilight began to darken, showing the near approach of night, he sent one of the witnesses out to hunt up the sheriff.

In ten minutes more, just as Foxcroft had sent out after candles, the sheriff returned and in his hands he held a lot of papers, which looked decidedly legal in their nature.

"What kept you so long?" Foxcroft asked, impatiently.

The sheriff was apparently considerably mixed up in his mind.

"See hyer, Justice, this is gwine to be the worst fuss I ever did see!" Johnson exclaimed.

Just then lighted candles were brought in and by their aid Johnson's face was discovered to wear a look of extreme bewilderment.

"What's the matter?" asked Foxcroft, hurriedly; a dim suspicion that there was trouble ahead occurred to him.

"That durned old cuss, Jedge Yell!" exclaimed the sheriff.

"What's the matter with the Judge?" Howard asked. He anticipated some fun.

"Well, that boy who came for me said somebody wanted to see me over to your office, Mr. Howard; and I went over thar, and found that the old Jedge had taken possession and was writing away for dear life. He looked at me and said, 'Mr. Johnson, I believe, sheriff of the county?' In course, I yelled right out; it tickled me, ye see, fur the Jedge to pretend not to know me, but he jest gi'n me one look, an' I didn't feel a bit like laughing arter that. The Jedge kin put his leetle squint-eyes right through a feller when he means business. 'Mr. Johnson,' he sed, 'I will thank you not to indulge in any onseemly hijinks in my court.' He didn't say hijinks, but hi-somethin'; one on them big words that the Jedge uses. Well, I kinder opened my eyes at that, an' I sed: 'You ain't a Jedge now, are you, Jedge?' He sung out, savage as a bob-tailed wildcat, 'Yes, sir, I am a county Judge, duly 'lected by the voters of Franklin county, and my term of office has not yet expired.' Then he turned to General Smith an' sed, 'Now, General, go ahead with your statement an' I'll issue the warrants for the arrest of all the parties concerned in this high-handed outrage upon your rights.' An' the long an' short o' the matter is that I've got to arrest this hyer hull court, including myself, and I sw'ar I don't know how I'm goin' to do that!" And then Johnson scratched his head in great perplexity.

"Shall I examine the papers, Justice?" Howard asked, his tone very earnest and his face very grave. "I am afraid that we have put our foot into it, in this case. The Judge knows the law; he was Judge of the county for two terms, eight years, and was elected for a third term just before the war broke out, but how he can claim that he is still a county judge puzzles me."

"If you will have the kindness," Foxcroft said, his voice just a little shaky. Howard's manner had alarmed him.

Then the lawyer took the papers from the sheriff and proceeded to examine them.

"This paper is directed to you, Judge," Howard said, opening the first document and looking at it by the light of the candle. "It's an injunction granted on the petition of Leonidas W. Smith to restrain Job Foxcroft from acting as Justice of the Peace for the county of Franklin. Grounds upon which the petition is based are that your election was illegal, fraudulent votes having been cast, and that the election is now being contested. The injunction ties you up, Justice; you can't do any thing until you have it dissolved."

"I knew that the other party claimed that there were illegal votes cast, but I didn't know they had taken any measures to contest my election," Foxcroft said, slowly.

"And these four are warrants for the arrest of Job Foxcroft, Robert Howard, Sheriff Lemuel Johnson, and King Congo, on charge of conspiring together in a malicious prosecution against Francis Texas, damages laid at twenty thousand dollars. By Jove, Justice, this is serious business!" cried Howard, jumping up as he spoke.

"But they can't prove it!" exclaimed Foxcroft, growing a shade whiter.

"I don't know, Justice," Howard said, doubtfully. "Old Yell knows what he's about. You see, you stretched that fine like thunder. Fifty dollars was really all the law would allow you in a case like this."

"What are the rest of the papers?" asked Foxcroft, nervously.

"Warrants for my client, there, Congo," Howard replied. "First charge, assault and battery; second, trespass on Smith's premises; third, conspiracy with intent to create a riot; fourth, false imprisonment, preferred by Mr. Texas, damages, five thousand dollars; fifth, using oaths in public thoroughfares."

Congo got up off the bench in horror at hearing this list of offenses.

"See hyer; I ain't gwine to hav' nuffin' more to do wid dis yere!" he exclaimed, addressing Foxcroft.

"The old Judge is on the war-path," Howard said, gravely; "and I see on the back of my warrant the Judge has done me the honor to pencil his claim to sit. He was elected in 1861 to serve four years; the war came in sixty-one, and he claims that until the close of the war in sixty-five his functions were suspended; and at that time he had still over three years to serve, making his time expire in sixty-nine. He strengthens his position by quoting in Latin phrase, '*Inter arma leges silent.*' (In the midst of war laws are silent.) Howard translated the phrase for Foxcroft's benefit.

"But will the law of Arkansas sustain such a position?"

"That will require a trial to decide," the lawyer replied, doubtfully; "and as the 'law's delays' are proverbial, it will be perhaps three to five years before the case can be de-

added. The Judge here says that General Smith is willing to compromise the matter. You fine Mr. Texas one dollar and costs in this case, and we conjointly to pay the costs of the other, issuing warrants, etc."

Gladly Foxcroft jumped at the offer, and so the great overseer case was settled.

CHAPTER XX.

AN ADVANCE IN FORCE.

NIGHT had come, and the "city" of Smithville was plunged in gloom, for though the stars were bright in the heavens, the moon had not yet risen.

About half-past seven Gol Adair, Dutch Pete, and Lieutenant Winnie, rode into the main street of the "Landing," and halted in front of the store kept by Foxcroft.

"Hyer's whar I'm gwine to stop," Gol said, as he reined in his horse, and the others followed his example.

Gol had half a dozen ducks slung over his arm.

"I reckon I can make a trade for what I want; but I 'spect that this yere store don't hold what you're arter, Pete." Then Gol happened to look at the window, and a lot of gaudy ribbons there displayed caught his eye.

"Wal, I don't know 'bout that either," he said, dubiously. "Ef it's ribbons yer arter, thar's a pretty good show."

"Ya, dat is goot," Pete replied, laconically. He dismounted as he spoke, undoing the knot of the hitching strap which was coiled around the horse's neck.

"I kinder 'spect that the old fat cuss don't keep the truck that you're arter, leftenant," Gol remarked, with a grin. "I never see'd any feminine ganders 'round his shanty."

"No, I 'reckon' not," the soldier replied, imitating the south-western twang of the other. "Well, take care of yourself; I'll be home about ten." Winnie then gathered up the reins of his horse.

"Look out for yourself, leftenant; keep yer eyes open—maybe some other critter may be shinin' 'round the gal, an' lay fur you in the dark!" Gol exclaimed, as the young soldier rode off.

Winnie only laughed, but did not reply.

"Poor lonesome little girl!" he muttered as he rode on; "there isn't much danger of my having a rival in this case. The noble young bloods of this extensive city, whose principal occupations are whisky-drinking and loafing about the saloons, would look with holy horror upon the idea of marrying this Yankee school-ma'am, who has left home and friends to come down to this desolate region to teach the blacks."

Vainly speculating upon the reception that he would meet, the lieutenant rode on until at last he halted in front of a little whitewashed shanty, occupied by Mercie Adams, the school-teacher.

Through the little window shone a dim light.

"She is at home," he murmured, as he dismounted from his horse; and then, leaning his arm upon the saddle, he looked around him vacantly, not that he feared danger, or apprehended that his movements were watched; and yet the face of the young soldier was quite pale; and, although the air of the night was warm and full of balmy perfume, coming from the opening blossoms in the little thicket near by, Winnie felt a cold shiver pass over him, and upon putting his hand to his brow, discovered that it was damp with perspiration.

The truth must be told—the lieutenant *was* afraid. The daring soldier who had donned the army-blue at the commencement of the war, as a private in the ranks, and had fought his way up to the grade of major of volunteers, and then at the close of the war had passed the examination, and received the commission of lieutenant, in the regular army, now trembled at the very thought of facing the young girl whom he was sure that he loved better than all the world beside.

For fully five minutes Winnie stood still by the side of his horse, his heart beating so violently that he could plainly count the throbs.

Then, with a determined effort stilling his agitation, he fastened his horse by the strap to the brush fence, and walked boldly to the house.

"Why should I fear the woman I love?" he muttered, as he rapped on the door. "She can but say no, and then it's all over—I may as well know my fate first as last."

After he rapped there was a moment of silence; then he heard the rustle of a woman's dress and a voice.

"Who is it?" she asked, her words low, but firm and clear.

"Lieutenant Winnie."

For three or four minutes there *was* silence; neither the girl within the house nor the man at the door moved.

Then suddenly the rustle of the dress came again to the ears of the soldier; then followed the noise of a bolt, and the grating turn of a key in the lock; the door opened and the girl appeared.

But though the door stood wide open, and the girl had drawn back to give him room to enter, thus mutely inviting him by deed, if not by word of mouth, yet the young soldier hesitated.

The girl noticed the hesitation. Her face was paler than usual, and an expression of care and deep thought was plainly visible upon it. For a moment the girl seemed in doubt. She glanced into the frank and honest face of the young soldier, then cast her eyes thoughtfully to the ground; and then suddenly seemed to come to a determination.

"Won't you come in?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Adams, but did you receive my letter?" he demanded, impulsively.

The girl looked at him for a moment; again her eyes sought the ground; she was evidently confused.

"Yes, I received it," she answered, slowly.

"I know that I am acting a great deal like an idiot just now," Winnie said, blushing to his temples, and feeling decidedly uncomfortable; "but perhaps what you have to say to me can be said just as well with me standing here, and—" and here the young soldier's voice failed him, and he broke down in a most helpless manner.

The girl looked at him just a second in silence, then the cold blue eyes seemed to soften, and just a little bit of a smile appeared on her lips.

"Mr. Winnie, I can not permit you to stand there while I give you an answer. I am sure that would be treating you very badly indeed, and you have been too good a friend to me for me to treat you in such a manner. Please come in," and as she spoke the girl retreated a step from the door.

"Yes, but you don't understand!" Winnie blurted out; "if you have any thing disagreeable to say, why, the moment you get through saying it, I can jump on my horse and be off, and there's an end of the affair."

"I hope that, no matter what I may be obliged to say, it will not make us strangers to each other." Miss Adams spoke earnestly.

"No, of course not," Winnie stammered. "I'm sure that I would be willing to do any thing in the world for you."

"Except come in when I ask you," she added, quickly, smiling as she spoke.

"But can't you say 'yes' or 'no' right away, and put me out of my misery?" he pleaded.

"You do not care, then, which it is, so long as I answer, eh?"

"Now you know better than that!"

"Yes, but do come in. I can not give you your answer in one little word."

"If I come in, I shall be under the impression that you will give me a favorable answer," he said, his face lighting up with a hopeful smile.

"You must not blame me then if you are disappointed," she replied, archly.

"By Jove, I won't be frightened!" he cried, suddenly, and with an air of determination. Then he went in and closed the door behind him.

As he removed his cloak and hat, and sat down in the chair she brought, he noticed that his letter lay unfolded upon the table. She had evidently been reading it when he knocked, and his heart drew a favorable augury from the circumstance.

"Mr. Winnie, do you know that I think that you must be a great coward in reality to be so afraid of a poor little woman like myself?" And as she spoke she sat down by the side of the table, and rested her arm upon the open letter.

"Well, that is easily explained," he replied, honestly.

"When I rapped, you hesitated before you asked who it was; and then, too, I should really think that it would be unpleasant for a lady to refuse a gentleman whom she respected, even if her heart did not incline to him. I feel pretty sure, you see, Miss Mercie, that you do respect me, though you may not think enough of me to give a favorable answer to the question which I asked in my letter. I feared that the

answer would be 'no,' and I thought that if it was to be my ill-fortune to hear it, by remaining outside it would be less painful to me and less unpleasant to you."

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE YANKEE SCHOOL-MA'AM."

THE girl looked at the young soldier for a moment, just a little bit of wonder in her face.

"I see that you don't understand," he said; "let me explain. It's only a few feet from my chair here to the door; three or four steps would take me outside, but my military experience has taught me that it is extremely difficult for a beaten army to make a successful retreat, but if you *do* say 'no,' I shall be so completely demoralized that I am sure my retreat will be a complete rout."

"Hadh't you better retreat before you begin?" asked the schoolmistress, smiling in the face of her lover.

"Oh, no, that is impossible now!" he exclaimed, earnestly; "like the hero of the ancient tragedy, 'returning were as tedious as to go o'er.'"

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his desert's too small,
That puts it not unto the touch
To win or lose it all,"

she repeated, still smiling.

"Those are my sentiments exactly!" he exclaimed, quickly.

"You noticed that I hesitated before I replied to your knock?" she asked, abruptly, changing the subject.

"Yes."

"Do you see those bullet-holes?" and the girl pointed to the door, in the upper part of which were three or four little round holes about the size of a revolver bullet.

Winnie got up from his chair and examined the marks, with considerable astonishment manifested in his face.

"These are bullet-holes!" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes; did you have any doubt upon the subject?"

"I thought that you were joking?"

"Come and sit down again and I will explain why I hesitated to open the door."

Winnie resumed his seat.

"I had been here just two weeks, and you can judge how lonely I was when I tell you that there were only some three or four white people who condescended to notice the negro school-teacher in the whole village; one of my scholars had about frightened the life out of me, that afternoon, by informing me that he had heard some of the young men at one of the saloons debating upon the propriety of warning me to leave town. That evening, about half-past eight or nine, I sat sewing just where you sit now. I confess I wasn't doing much work, for my eyes were blinded with tears half the time as I thought of my cozy little New England home, and then reflected that I was so many miles from that home away down here in this heathen country. And then, just as I was meditating upon whether there was any danger that the high-toned gentlemen of this place would think proper to molest a helpless and unprotected woman, I heard the clatter of horses' hoofs; then they halted, and I heard a coarse voice cry out, 'Riddle the cursed shanty!' and then the bullets came rattling against the house and some came through the door. I sunk down upon my knees; I don't suppose that I am a very religious girl, but I prayed then with my whole heart, for I thought that my last hour had come; but, after they fired the shots, they gave a loud yell and galloped away."

"The curs!" muttered Winnie, in contempt.

"Yes, it wasn't a very brave act for men to perform, but it really resulted in good to me, for naturally the young men boasted of their bravery; it was the talk of the whole village the next morning, and I was surprised by a visit from six or eight of the leading men of the village at noon, in my school-room, headed by General Smith and Mr. Fayette, the banker. They made all sorts of apologies for the cowardly act, and said that I mustn't think the inhabitants of the city at large countenanced such infamous proceedings—they call this place a city, you know. And both General Smith and Mr. Fayette tendered me the offer of a room in either of their houses as long as I should stay here. Of course I thanked them for their kindness, but, declining their offer, I told them I preferred to remain in my own little home."

"Puck!" exclaimed Winnie, in admiration.

"No, stubbornness," Mercie replied. "If I had been left alone I should have gone away, for I was so lonesome and homesick, but, after the cowardly attack, I determined that they should not frighten me away. They might kill me if they liked, but I would not fly from their threats."

"Have you ever been troubled since then?"

"No; the attitude that General Smith and five or six of the other leading men of the village took had something to do with it, I suppose."

"But you thought that there was danger threatening when you heard me ride up to-night?"

"Yes; this afternoon old Uncle Snow came to the school-house, just as I had dismissed the scholars, and told me that I must be careful, for he had heard talk among the negroes that threats had been made against me again, and that some of the blacks would like to come up armed and watch my house every night if I was willing. Of course I told them that I did not wish them to do that, but if he was sure that there was any danger I would send for General Smith."

"And have you sent for the General?"

"Not yet. I shall send to-morrow morning."

"What ever induced you to leave your northern home to come down to this half-civilized country?" asked Winnie, in amazement.

"Money," was the candid reply. "I am poor; my father was wounded in the war and is a cripple for life; my little sister and mother have managed to get a sewing-machine and so supported the family. I am not strong enough to earn my bread in that way, and when I got the chance to teach I regarded it in the light of a blessing, even though I had to leave home and friends and come to this place where I am almost as much alone as if I were on a desert island. I am only engaged for a year, and when my time is up I shall be able to carry quite a nice sum of money home, for I get a very good salary indeed; I shouldn't have come if I hadn't."

"At the end of the year you will be free?"

"Yes."

"Well, I can offer you a situation then," Winnie said, soberly.

"A situation!" Mercie exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes; I'll give you your board and clothes and spending money to do housework for me for all the rest of your life, and pay a minister to seal the bargain besides."

The schoolmistress laughed.

"You don't know much about me," she said.

"And you don't know much about me," he replied; "so we are even there."

"And you are a soldier."

"Is that an objection?"

"Yes; I will never marry you as long as you are in the army," she said, firmly. "When I marry I want a little home of my own, even if it is no larger than this."

"You're right," he rejoined, thoughtfully; "the wife of a soldier has to choose between her husband and a home; she can not have both. Well, I'll resign, and I can with honor too. There's a bill now in Congress to reduce the army to peace footing, and the officers who choose to resign will be allowed quite a handsome sum, about a year's pay, I believe. I am a carriage-maker by trade. We'll select some pretty town; I'll start a wagon-shop and settle down. Will that do?"

"I haven't said 'yes' yet," she protested, smiling.

"Ah, but I know that you mean to say it or you would have said 'no' long ago."

"It must be nearly nine," she said, abruptly; "if any one should see you leave the house what a scandal it would create."

"Not if I could proclaim myself your affianced husband; come now, you must say yes."

"Well, if I must, I suppose I must: *yes*!" and then, with a sad smile, she held up her lips to be kissed.

Half an hour afterward the young soldier departed, feeling extremely happy.

The girl watched him from the open doorway until even the sound of his horse's hoofs died away in the distance; then closing the door listlessly behind her, she resumed her seat by the table and gave way to dreamy meditations.

From the reverie she was rudely aroused. The door swung suddenly open, and an ugly little man bristling with weapons strode into the room. The intruder was Yell Ozark, the Arkansas outlaw!

CHAPTER XXII.

TRAPPED BY A WOMAN.

The girl raised her eyes in astonishment when the outlaw entered the room so abruptly, but she did not rise from her chair.

Ozark banged the door behind him; then drew a revolver from his breast, cocked it, and leveled the shining tube directly at the girl's head.

Coldly the blue eyes of the girl gleamed, but she did not quiver nor even move; her face was like marble, so cold and white.

"You're the Yankee school-marm, I reckon!" cried the outlaw, boisterously.

"I am Miss Adams, the school-teacher," the girl answered, cold as an iceberg, and not betraying the least sign of fear.

"And you've come down hyer fur to teach the nigs, dog-gone thar black hides!" exclaimed the ruffian, fiercely.

"I teach a colored school," Mercie said, and just a little tinge of red appeared on her pale cheeks.

"An' that's what's the matter!" Ozark exclaimed, facetiously. "Do you know who I am?"

"I do not think that I have ever had the pleasure of seeing you before," the girl replied, coolly, calmly, and with perfect self-possession.

The outlaw was staggered by the girl's calmness. He had expected a torrent of tears and pitiful supplications for mercy; but, instead, the girl looked him full in the eye, never quivered at the sight of the leveled revolver, although it was perfectly apparent that a single motion of his finger would send the leaden ball crushing through her forehead.

"Wal, you're a cool hand, my beauty, anyhow!" Ozark muttered, and just then he caught sight of a glint of fire in the cold blue eyes, and a single tremor of the thin lips, which warned him as plainly of danger as though the signs had been translated into words.

"Look out! don't try that!" the outlaw ejaculated, hurriedly. "I kin put a ball-plum through you before you kin wink if I feel like it!"

"Don't try what?" asked the girl, moving neither hand nor foot, but the ominous light still shining in her eyes.

"What you're thinkin' about! You can't play any tricks upon me, I reckon!"

"I have not thought of playing any tricks upon you," the girl replied, a contemptuous look upon her face. "I was only thinking what a mean, cowardly ruffian you must be."

Had the girl risen from her seat and struck him in the face with her thin, white hand, despite the threat of the leveled revolver, Ozark could not have been more astonished than he was at the scornful words.

He shook his head for a moment in wonder, just as the buffalo-bull does when the leaden hail of the hunters rattles against his iron-like frontlet.

"Wal, now, you're kinder hoopin' it up lively, ain't yer!" he exclaimed, in profound astonishment. "You're jist the sarciest gal, I reckon, that I ever did run across! Look hyer! don't you know that all I hev to do is to pull the trigger of this hyer pop-gun and thar'll be one nigger school-marm the less in Arkansas?"

"I am not at all afraid of you," was the scornful retort; "it requires courage to commit a murder, and I do not believe that the man who is coward enough to bully and threaten a defenseless woman can possess nerve enough to risk the gallows."

"I'll be dog-goned if I hav'n't a good mind to put a hole right plum through you fur bein' so durned sarcy!" cried the outlaw, exasperated. "Look a-hyer! I'm Yell Ozark, I am! I'm the terror of this hyer State, and I've wiped out more men than I've got fingers and toes."

If the outlaw had expected that the announcement of his name and deeds would strike terror to the heart of the girl he was woefully disappointed.

Not a muscle of her face changed. Steadily she looked at the outlaw's face, scorn in the curl of her lips, and undaunted courage in the gleam of her eyes.

"I'm the man that has never surrendered!" he continued, boastfully, "an' I don't mean to, either. I have fit the durned Yankee Government single-handed, an' I ain't whipped yit. All I want is my double-barrel an' a handful of buck-shot, an' I kin whip my weight in wilcats every time. I kin jist salivate 'em, I kin!"

"If you can fight as well as you can talk, you must be a very doughty warrior," the girl retorted, contemptuously.

"See hyer, young gal; you're jist temptin' Providence a-sarcin' me in this hyer way!" the outlaw said, quite seriously. "Ef I had really come fur to wipe you out, I wouldn't hev stood so much jaw from you; 'sides I'd 'a' had my gun along. I never travel fur without that we'pon; but I've jist dropped in fur to giv' you a friendly call like, an a leetle bit of a warnin'. I fight men, I do, not wimmen-folks."

"As I said before, I am not at all afraid of you," Mercie again reminded him.

"Wal, I reckon you've got the grit of a wild-cat!" exclaimed Ozark, just a little bit of admiration in his voice.

"An' now for business," Ozark said; "I've constituted myself a committee of one to request you to cl'ar out of these hyer parts. The nigs know too much now, an' I've jist made up my mind to shet up all these hyer durned school-houses, an' now I jist warn you to git up an' dust."

"You mean that you wish me to go away from Smith-ville?"

"That's my platform!"

"And if I do not go?"

"I'll put a load of buck-shot clean through you some of these hyer mornin's when you're gwine to your durned old school-house!" cried Ozark, fiercely, and, as he spoke, he let down the hammer of the revolver and thrust the weapon into his belt.

"And you order me away because I teach the negroes?"

"Yes; the dog-goned nigs know too much a'ready. I'm jist gwine to stop the hull thing. I've made up my mind to shet up every nigger school in this hyer county, ef it takes me all my time to lay in the bush an' shoot the teachers," Ozark said, with an air of determination. "I reckon, though, that I won't have to do that, for I s'pect my warnin' to quit will be enough."

"Do you ever read your Bible?" the girl asked, suddenly.

The outlaw stared at the question.

"Wal, I reckon I ain't got sich a thing," he had to answer.

"Let me give you one."

The girl rose from her seat, opened the drawer of the table, which was between her and the outlaw, drew out a revolver, cocked it in a second, and leveled it full at the breast of the outlaw.

For almost the first time in his life Ozark was cornered. The first suspicion of the danger that he had had was when he heard the "click" of the lock as the girl drew back the hammer.

A long, convulsive breath came from between the ruffian's lips. Bold, desperate man that he was, he dreaded to die like a rat in a trap by the hand of a woman.

"Give me your word never to attempt to molest me, or else pray to Heaven to have mercy upon your soul!" the girl said, in a low, determined voice.

"You won't dare to fire?" Ozark muttered.

"As Heaven is my judge, I will!" the girl replied. "If you do not give me the promise, or if you attempt to move, I will kill you with as little mercy as I would a wild beast."

"An' you would trust my word not to worry ye?"

"Yes."

"All right! it's a bargain, then," Ozark cried, abruptly. "I ain't afeard of death, but I'll be durned ef I'd like to be wiped out by you. Paddle ahead with your nigs; may I be skinned by wild-cats ef I tech ye!"

And then the outlaw turned abruptly around and plunged through the door into the darkness, while Mercie, saved by her own brave act, fell in a dead faint to the floor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOMEWARD.

"It's all settled up, Judge," Howard said, as he entered the little office which the old lawyer had taken possession of so unceremoniously.

The overseer, Texas, followed Howard into the apartment.

"It's all right, then?" General Smith exclaimed, rubbing his hands together gleefully.

"Yes; the points you made, Judge, were too much for Foxcroft, and he was glad to get the chance to compromise the matter," Howard answered.

"And did he accept it all as law and gospel?" Yell asked, a bland smile upon his fat face.

"Well, it was a little hard for him to swallow; but I assured him that you knew the law, and that it would require a trial even if your points were not tenable," Howard replied.

"He's a bigger fool then than I thought he was," Yell remarked; "after I had started Johnson over with the papers, I was a leetle afraid I had put it too strong; and yet he never smoked it, eh?" and then the Judge laid back in his chair, and indulged in a series of short, dry chuckles indicative of extraordinary mirth.

"I don't see how in thunder you kept your face so well in the court-room," Howard observed in a tone of wonder. "I come near snorting two or three times, right out!"

The General and Texas had listened in astonishment to the words of the two lawyers; and then, after Howard finished his observation, seeing him sit down in a chair and laugh until the tears came into his eyes, the truth instantly flashed across the minds of both the lookers on.

Smith got up from his chair in extreme excitement.

"You don't mean to say that the outrageous conduct of both of you in the court-room was all a hoax on Foxcroft!" the General exclaimed.

"A hoax!" and the old Judge straightened up and put on a solemn look. "General Smith, what do you take me for?" and then Yell shook his forefinger slowly at the old soldier. "No, sir! To-day you witnessed a 'specimen brick' of how we used to administer justice in Arkansas in the olden time. Mr. Foxcroft is a stranger; we but followed the scriptural injunction when we 'took him in.' Doubtless in his far-off northern or eastern home he has often heard stories of how we conduct our courts of justice in this benighted region; we men who are innocent of shirt-collars, and who don't take much stock in store-clothes. When he was called upon to assume the seat of Justice, he naturally expected to see what he had heard about, and I really flatter myself that Bob, and your humble servant, succeeded in making a decided impression upon this 'looker-on in Venice.' After he has 'spoiled the Egyptians' and goes back to his 'native heath,' he'll be able to tell a pretty good story of how we run the law-courts down in this region."

And then, as Smith thought over the scene in the court-room, and realized that it was all a stupendous joke, coolly planned and cleverly executed by the old fat lawyer, assisted by his younger legal brother, he could not restrain his laughter.

"I swear, Judge!" Smith exclaimed, after he got through laughing, "this is the richest joke I ever heard of. It's too good to keep!"

"Ah, no," the Judge replied, solemnly. "Your 'fingers on your lips I pray.' It will never do to let it out; the worthy Justice would never hear the last of it; but, General Smith, I consider, sir, that you have ill-used me to-day."

This abrupt accusation considerably astonished the planter.

"What have I done now?"

"It is not the sin of commission, General Smith, that you have to answer for, but the contrary," the Judge explained with dignity, shaking the awful forefinger at Smith as he spoke. "It is a well-known fact, sir, for forty miles around, that Jim Yates, over opposite, at the General Lee saloon, keeps as good whisky as can be got in the State of Arkansas, and you have never said 'fire-water' to me once, to-day, sir."

"Come on, then, you old humbug!" cried Smith, advancing to the door; "come, gentlemen, join us." He addressed Howard and Texas.

"Send for Johnson!" cried Yell, as the party emerged into the street. "My conscience would upbraid me if we drank without our worthy sheriff."

And so the party waited until "Mister Johnson," as the Judge persisted in calling him, was hunted up.

The convivial ceremonies over, the Judge, Smith, and Texas, mounted their horses, rode down to the post-office, received their mail, and then departed homeward.

Judge Yell bid them good-night when he arrived at his place, and the General and his overseer continued on their way.

Naturally they fell into conversation in regard to the trial. Texas expressed his surprise at the enormous fine that the Justice had wished to inflict upon him.

"Yell explained all about that," the General said. "You see Foxcroft is anxious to get the goodwill of the negroes, and naturally the blacks would be inclined to look upon this affair as a sort of an outrage upon them, not knowing all

the details of the case. If Foxcroft isn't careful, though, he'll get into trouble. There was no cause for inflicting a heavy fine in this affair. If he had simply fined you five dollars, why of course it would have been paid in a moment, but he overshot the mark and gave the Judge a chance to get back at him. I swear, though, I never dreamed that the whole thing in the court-room was a joke, though I did think that both Howard and the Judge were acting like a couple of lunatics."

Texas said very little as they rode on, and the General did all the talking. He was in high spirits at the way things had gone, and he expressed his opinion that there wouldn't be much more trouble with the hands.

The overseer was strangely moody, and seemed absorbed in his own thoughts, merely assenting to the General's remarks.

As the two rode up to the house, they detected the flutter of a white dress on the piazza; and as they reined in their horses, Missouri came down the steps.

"What kept you so late, father?" she asked; "I've had supper for ever so long."

"We'll do it justice now," Smith replied; "we come back conquering heroes."

At the supper-table Smith related what had transpired in the court of Justice Foxcroft, a partial account of which Sam had already given his mistress.

Smith had a hearty laugh as he recited the extraordinary proceedings of old Judge Yell and Bob Howard, but the overseer, although he smiled in sympathy with the General's merriment, did not seem to share his glee.

Missouri, who had watched the overseer's face closely, detected an expression there which she had never seen before. It was evident to her that his mind was bent upon some subject not at all connected with the 'sault and battery case, and she shrewdly guessed that the subject was not a pleasant one, whatever it might be.

After supper The-Man-from-Texas begged to be excused, and immediately retired.

Pretty Missouri frowned and bit her lip. It was plain that she did not like the proceeding.

The overseer pulled his hat down over his eyes as he descended the steps, and took his way to the stable.

As he approached the building he heard the sounds of negro voices, and loud bursts of laughter from the interior.

Pausing for a moment on the threshold, he soon discovered that Sam was entertaining a select circle of friends with an imitation of the trial-scene before Justice Foxcroft, and just at that moment was delivering Judge Yell's closing speech, with such a laughable imitation of the Judge's manner that it brought a smile to the lips of Texas, moody as he was. But then he interrupted the exhibition by knocking on the stable door, and calling upon Sam to come out.

In a moment the darkey made his appearance.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"LIFTING THE TRAIL."

"By golly! Is dat you, Massa Texas?" Sam exclaimed, as he opened the door, and the light streaming out revealed the face and form of the overseer.

"Yes; come out; I want to speak to you."

"Yes, sar," and Sam advanced a step or two.

"Close the door; I want you to walk up the road a piece."

"Yes, sar," responded the negro, promptly; then he closed the door and followed the overseer.

"Haden't you better go and get a hat?" Texas asked, noticing that the black was uncovered.

"Is you gwine far?"

"Oh, no, only up to the gate; I want to have a little talk with you about the hands," the overseer answered.

"All right, den; s'pect I won't catch de r'u'matis'; dis yer child tough," Sam said, confidently.

The two walked slowly past the house and down the shady avenue, bordered by magnolia trees, which led to the main road.

"Quite a number of the hands are in the stable now, I suppose?" Texas asked.

"Yes, sar; de boys heerd jes' a bit 'bout dat yer trial an'

how de ole Judge fatched dem, an' dey come up for to git me to 'splain de matter to dere obfuscated interlums," Sam explained, with a great deal of dignity visible in his manner.

"What do they think about the affair?"

"By golly, dey say dat de ole Judge is mad for sure, an' dat young Bob Howard ain't much better, fur he's generally dat full of whisky dat it wouldn't do fur to hold a lighted match near his mouf, kase he'd 'splode, sure's yer born."

"But what do they think of the way I handled King Congo?"

"Now, Massa Texas, I jes' tell yer w'at it is!" Sam exclaimed, emphatically, "dar ain't a nig on dis yer plantatioz dat would dar' to wink crossways at ye now. Dat Congo 'e jes' de worst man you eber see'd. He's jes' bin walkin' right ober de darkies round heah eber since he come."

"You think, then, that we will not have any trouble with the hands?" Texas asked, thoughtfully.

"Not a mite, Massa Texas!" Sam exclaimed, in a very decided manner; "dey's all willin' to work, ef dem bad niggers will only keep away an' luff 'em alone. Dey's got to live jes' like a white man, an' ef dey don't work, whar is dey gwine to git dar victulums? an' dat's w'at's de matter wid Hannah."

"The hands generally are perfectly willing to work, I suppose, if such fellows as this Congo leave them alone?"

"By golly, Massa Texas, you kin jes' bet all de ha'r on de back of your head on dat!" Sam replied, emphatically. "It's jes' such mean brack niggers as dis yer Congo dat makes all de fuss. I 'clar' to goodness, I done t'ink you smash him ribs in when you hit dat belly-whopper dat time. By golly! he looked as ef he had bin sent fur an' couldn't come!"

The overseer laughed at the expression.

"Who were those fellows that Congo had along with him?"

"Dem dar'ies dat lie so in de court?"

"Yes."

"I don't wan' fur to say nuffin ag'in' nobody," Sam said, cautiously, "but, ef I was a chicken an' saw dem nigs comin' in de night, I'd jes' roost mighty high."

"Don't work much, I suppose?"

"De hardest work dey eber do is huntin' 'coons in de swamp," Sam replied, disdainfully. "Dem's poor trash; ain't fit fur nuffin but to drink whisky, an' sleep in de sun wid dere moufs open fur to ketch flies."

"Yes, but this old fellow that they call Uncle Snow, is he one of that class, too?" Texas asked, carelessly.

"Oh, no, sar; he's a gemmen, he is. He's jes' one of de best ole niggers dat dere is in dis yer country. Why, he was raised on dis yer place wid de Ginerel."

"He was?"

"Yes, sar; 'fore de war he was de Ginerel's own man; but when de Ginerel was off wid de sodjers, arter de Linkun Yankees come, de ole Uncle started a store fur to sell to de sodjers; you see, dere was 'bout a hundred Yankees down to de landing."

"And did the old man make out pretty well?" Texas asked, in a careless sort of way.

"Yes, sar; he done fust-rate, an' he's got a mighty nice little store now in his ole shanty; he does a heap of business dere."

"Where is the old man's store?"

Texas asked the question more with the air of a man who was merely talking because he had nothing better to do than from any real interest in the subject.

"You knows whar de Judge's place is; an' ef you noticed dat jes' afore you get to de furst house de odder side of de Judge's place dat dere is a small road turns off to de right."

"Yes, I think I noticed it," the overseer said, thoughtfully; "there's a small whitewashed shanty on the left, facing the road, isn't there?"

"Yes, sar," Sam replied, promptly. "Well, when you get to dat road you turn off to de right han', as ef you was a-gwine to Fort Smith, an' de furst house you come to is ole Uncle Snow's."

Then the overseer turned abruptly round and commenced to walk back to the house; Sam followed his example.

"You think that there will be no trouble with the hands?" Texas said, returning to the former subject again.

"No, sar; sure as yer born!" replied the negro, decidedly; "dere won't any more mean brack trash come fo' lin' round; dis yer plantation arter de way you wolloped Congo; but jes' you look out, Massa Texas, dat dat mean nig don't hide in a fence-corner wid a shot-gun fur yer some time; he'd jes' as soon shoot a man as eat a roasted 'possum."

"I'll keep my eyes open for him," Texas replied, in his cool, careless way. "If he ever levels a weapon at me, I'll give him a chance to get measured for a coffin before he can pull the trigger."

"Hi-yah!" chuckled Sam; "I'd walk ten miles fur to see dat nigger planted, 'deed I would!"

The two walked on in silence until they reached the house.

With his foot on the steps, Texas spoke:

"We'll take field bright and early to-morrow; we must make up for the time lost to-day."

"Yes, sar; de nigs are willin' fur to do all dey kin ef dey ain't 'sturbed by scallywag'lums like dat Congo," Sam replied, as he departed for the stable.

The overseer proceeded up-stairs directly to his room, drew a match on the sole of his boot and lit a candle which stood upon the mantelpiece.

The face of the overseer was dark and gloomy, and there was a restless, fitful light in his eyes.

He opened the top drawer of the little bureau, which stood between the two windows, and from the drawer took the leather belt which swung the two holsters into which the revolvers were thrust.

Texas drew the revolvers from the holsters, and, by the light of the candle, inspected the charges. Fully satisfied that they were in perfect order, he returned them to their places and buckled the belt around his waist. Then from the draws he took the keen-edged bowie-knife and thrust it through the belt. And after this was done, he extinguished the candle, and quietly closing the door behind him, stole with noiseless steps down the stairs.

With equal caution he opened the front door of the house and closed it behind him, after he had passed through the portal.

The sounds of laughter and of merriment still came from the negroes in the stable.

Texas hesitated and listened for a moment; then descending the steps, he walked cautiously down the avenue toward the road.

He fancied that he was unobserved, but his thought was wrong, for Missouri, sitting by one of the windows of her bedchamber, which overlooked the approach to the house, detected the figure of the overseer skulking, like a thief in the night, into the dense shadows cast by the magnolia trees.

CHAPTER XXV.

OLE UNCLE SNOW.

WITH cautious steps the overseer proceeded until he came to the main road; then he cast a single glance back at the house as if to reassure himself that his departure had not been noticed by any one. Feeling fully satisfied that he was unobserved, he proceeded with rapid steps down the road toward Smithville.

It was one of the balmy spring nights so common to Arkansas. The dark-blue sky above was studded with a countless myriad of twinkling stars—spangled over with the jewels of the night. The moon had not yet risen, but afar off on the line of the eastern horizon appeared the faint glow of light which heralded the coming of the bride of darkness. The insects of the night piped their shrill tones from earth, grass, bush and tree, and all the air was filled with a sweet, subtle perfume coming from the opening spring blossoms.

But the overseer heeded not the glorious sky above, the notes of the night insects, nor the sweet incense of Nature's children. Once he had paused and cast a glance up at the be-diamonded heavens above, not to look and wonder at the flashing lamps of the firmament, but to note how soon the moon would rise, and then again he had halted for a second in his rapid onward stride when the distant howls of the watch-dogs broke upon the stillness of the night, as cur answered cur in fierce and vaporous yowl.

Onward with vigorous strides he went, the fierce passion of the chase swelling in his heart, and what scent so hot in our nostrils as when we track the human quarry?

Judge Yell's place he passed and came to where the narrow road turned off to the right.

Twenty paces up the road, heading to the west, and the overseer paused in front of a small two-story shanty, the whitewashed walls of which glared out on the gloom of the night.

Through the cracks of the door and the tightly-shuttered windows came the flickering rays of a light, showing that the inmates of the shanty had not yet retired to rest.

The overseer stepped up to the door and knocked.

There was a moment of silence, then came the sound of some one moving within the shanty and then steps approached the door but no one spoke. The overseer guessed at once that the inmate was listening as if to assure himself that his ears had not deceived him; so Texas raised his hand and thumped on the door again.

"Who's dar?" questioned a voice from within, and from the voice the overseer recognized at once that it was the old uncle in person who spoke.

"Mr. Texas, General Smith's overseer."

"An' does you want fur to see me?" the old negro asked.

"Yes, I've got some very important business with you; open the door."

"Is you all alone?"

"Yes," Texas replied, wondering at the old man's caution.

Then he heard the noise made by the negro in removing the stout bar which fastened the door, and after that the door opened and the old, white-headed darky peered out cautiously.

"Fore de Lord, dat is you for sure, Massa Texas!" the old negro exclaimed, throwing open the door widely so that the overseer could enter; an invitation which he immediately proceeded to accept.

The interior of the shanty consisted of one room only. On the right hand was a small counter, and around the sides of the room were shelves filled with a miscellaneous stock of groceries and dry-goods.

A tallow candle burned on the counter, and near by was a cane-seat arm-chair which the old negro evidently had been occupying when he had been aroused by the knock at the door.

At one end of the room was a ladder which led to the second story.

"Did you have any doubt as to whether it was me or not?" the overseer asked, as the old man closed the door again and proceeded to put up the bar.

"Yes, sar," the old uncle answered, promptly; "dere's a heap of mean white folks—an' brack trash too fur dat matter—a-prowlin' round arter dark. You can't be too keerful, Massa Texas. Dey t'ink dat de ole man's got a little money 'kase I keeps dis yere store, an' I done t'ink dat dey will trouble me sometime. I t'ought I knew yer voice, but I wasn't gwine to leff you in afore I know'd fur sure."

"Is there anybody besides ourselves in the house?" Texas asked, glancing around, and his eyes resting upon the rude ladder leading to the upper story.

"Yes, sar; dere's my gran'son up dar," the old negro replied. "I 'spect he's sound asleep dough; dat chile kin sleep like a yaller dog in de sun."

"You had better find out if he is asleep, for I have something very particular to say to you, and I don't wish any one to hear it besides ourselves." Texas spoke with evident earnestness.

The old negro looked astonished. He couldn't imagine what could be the nature of the communication.

"I done see, sar," he replied. "Ephraim, you Ephraim!" he called, going to the foot of the ladder; but there was no answer from the occupant of the room above. "I done t'ink he's sound as a 'coon in a hollow tree, Massa Texas," the old negro said, in a tone of conviction. "I'll jes' take a look up dar an' see dough, fur sure."

The old man climbed up the ladder, and as his head emerged through a hole in the floor above, the heavy breathing of the young negro, who was stretched out, wrapped in a buffalo robe, in the further corner of the upper room, convinced him that the boy was sound asleep.

The negro descended the ladder again.

"Is he asleep?" Texas asked.

"Jes' like a log, sar; 'fore de Lord, he isn't gwine to done wake out of dat sleep afore de mornin'," the old negro answered.

"Then he will not be like to overhear our conversation?"

"No, sar."

"Sit down, uncle, for I reckon we've got quite a talk before us," Texas said, helping himself to the arm-chair by the counter while the old negro sat down on a keg near by, an expression of wonder on his face.

"Now, uncle, we want to go a good ways back—way back to the first of the war," Texas began.

"Yes, sar; but dis yere ole nigger is jes' stumped as to w'at you's gwine to say," the aged black remarked, in wonder.

"You will understand pretty soon; but, in the first place, before I commence, I want you to promise to keep what I am going to say a profound secret. You mustn't say a word about the matter to any one. Will you promise that?"

The old darky thought the matter over for a few minutes in silence.

"See hyer, Massa Texas," he said, at length, "you isn't gwine to git me inter any trouble, is you?"

"Oh, no; no fear of that."

"Well, then, as long as you isn't gwine to ax me fur to hurt nobody or nuffin' I'll 'gree fur to keep my mouf shet."

"That is all I ask," the overseer rejoined; then he remained silent for a few minutes, evidently deliberating how to begin, while the old negro watched him with an expression of wonder visible on his wrinkled, dried-up features.

"You remember when the war commenced, in sixty-one?"

"Yes, sar," the old uncle replied, promptly; "I was living on General Smith's place den; dar's whar I was raised. De Ginerel was kurnel of de fust rigiment dat was got up 'round hyer. I 'spected dat de Ginerel would want me fur to go 'long when de rigiment marched fur Missouri wid Massa Ginerel Price, but de ole massa t'ought dat I was too ole fur to go wid de sodgers an' luff me behind."

"Do you remember about two years after that time, in the spring of sixty-three, when a regiment of Texas troops were quartered down at the landing?"

"Yes, sar," the old negro replied; "dey was rigular game-cocks, dey was; dey had more fightin' an' gamblin' an' whisky drinkin' in dat air rigiment dan any odder rigiment dat I eber see'd. De ossifers of dat 'ere rigiment used fur to ride t'rough de town jes' b'ilin' drunk."

"And just about that time quite a number of strange blacks came into the landing, a great many came with this same Texas regiment?"

"Yes, sar; 'fore de Lord, dere was a heap of scallywags wid dat rigiment!"

"Did you ever happen to meet at that time with a light-colored yellow fellow named Jupiter?"

Old Uncle Snow started in amazement, and an expression of profound wonder came over his sable face.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE YELLOW BOY, JUPE.

THE eyes of the overseer sparkled as he noticed the expression upon the face of the negro. He felt sure that he was upon the right scent, after all.

Old Uncle Snow looked down at the floor; then he stared up at the ceiling; and, finally, he cast a cautious glance at the face of the overseer, but the calm expression he saw there did not aid him in the least to guess why Francis Texas should inquire concerning a vagabond freedman.

"Why does you want to know?" the old negro asked, cautiously, and with a look of intense curiosity upon his dried-up features.

The overseer laughed.

"What the deuce has that got to do with it?" he questioned. "I simply asked you, old man, if you knew the boy. What do you care what I want with him?"

"Of course it's no bus'ness of mine, sar; I know that fur sure. You see, I only axed kase you kinder frustrated me. 'Fore de Lord, how could I tell dat you know'd any t'ing 'bout Jupe?" the negro replied, evasively.

"You knew a yellow fellow called Jupiter, then?"

"Yes, sar."

"Have you any idea where he is now?"

"No, sar; I ain't set my eyes on him since he done leave dis yere place, in eighteen-sixty-four," Uncle Snow answered, very quickly.

"What sort of a boy was this Jupe?"

"He was a right smart, good boy, sar."

"Were you pretty intimate with him when he was around here?" Texas asked, in quite an indifferent sort of way, but as he put the question, he watched the face of the old negro intently.

"Yes, sar, I knowed him pretty well."

"I met Jupiter down in Texas and he told me that he had some right good friends up this way. He spoke particularly about some good old aunty who nursed him through a long attack of the swamp-fever that kept him on his back for a long time."

"Wot's dat!" exclaimed the old negro, in astonishment; "an ole aunty nurse him t'rough a fever? By golly! dat was me; yes, sar!"

"It was you?" the overseer said, apparently astonished.

"Yes, sar, dis yere ole nigger!" replied Uncle Snow, emphatically; "dere wa'n't a she-woman round dat boy from de furst to de las'. I nussed him from de time dat I diskivered him flat on his back, out in de cabin by de swamp, till he went away from dis yere place, down de riber in de Des Arc."

"Come to think of it, I believe Jupiter did tell me that it was a man that helped him along," the overseer remarked.

"Yes, sar; it was me, sure as you're born!" Uncle Snow persisted.

"Of course you don't know that Jupiter is dead?" Texas said.

"Dead!" exclaimed the old man, in wonder; "is dat so?"

"Yes; he walked off a steamer one night in the dark, coming up the Mississippi, and the current swept him down. The body even was never recovered."

"Poor nigger," Uncle Snow observed, with a shake of his head.

"Yes; he gave just one cry when he struck the water, and then 'he current sucked him under. That was only about two weeks ago. He and I were coming up the river together, bound for this place."

The old negro looked a little astonished at this intelligence. He couldn't understand what possible interest there could be in common between the freedman, Jupiter, and the red-coated overseer.

"And poor Jupiter drowned fur sure?" the negro murmured, in a melancholy tone.

"Yes; and now, Uncle Snow, I've come after that package Jupiter left in your care," Texas said, in an off-hand way.

The negro gave just a little bit of a start, but he did not seem so much astonished as he had been at first.

"A package dat Jupe left with me?" the old fellow inquired.

"Yes; if you have any doubts, just look at this ring," the overseer said, and he took a small seal ring of chased gold from his wallet and gave it into the hands of Uncle Snow.

The old negro looked at it carefully. From the expression upon his features it was plainly evident that he had seen it before.

"Do you recognize it?" Texas asked.

"Yes, sar."

"And you will surrender the package to me that he left with you for safe keeping?"

"Fore de Lord, he didn't leave any package wid me, sar," the old negro replied, earnestly.

The overseer laughed; he understood the subterfuge.

"Uncle Snow, have you any objection to tell me how y' became acquainted with Jupiter?" Texas asked.

The old darky cocked his head on one side after the fashion of a deliberating hen and looked at the overseer for a moment with an expression of profound wisdom plainly visible upon his wrinkled features. He was apparently meditating whether he would compromise himself in any way by giving the information that the overseer had asked for.

"Well, I dunno," he said, slowly; "I don't see as it will hurt nuffin' ef I tole you 'bout de 'hole t'ing."

"I don't see myself how it will possibly harm any one, Uncle, if you open your potato-trap and spit it out," Texas said, smilingly. "Jupiter's dead; so it can't damage him."

"No, sar, an' I don't 'spect dat it would hurt him a mite ef he wasn't," the old darky said, sagely. "But you see, sar, your comin' in dis yere promisc'us way an' 'quirin' 'bout dat yaller boy has so kinder obfuscated me dat I 'clare to man I'se completely conglomerated."

"Go ahead and tell me what you know about the boy, and then I'll explain to you why I inquire and the means by which I have been constituted heir to the package that Jupiter left in this town."

"Yes, sar," the negro said, absently; his mind was evidently in a fog. The easy assurance of the overseer perplexed him.

"You first met Jupe in sixty-three, I believe?"

"Yes, sar, it was when dat yere Texas regiment was hyer. I had jes' got permission from de Ginerall fur to open dis yere store. I kin remember jes' as well as kin be, it was de very night dat dat Texas regiment left de landin' fur to go an' fight dat Yankee Ginerall Steele dat was advancin' fur to gobble up Little Rock, an' 'fore de Lord, he did, too, in spite of 'em.

Well, sar, dat very night I was a-comin' on over Mulberry crick road—you see, I'd been back in de country, fur to buy some eggs an' chickens an' a lot of odder truck; an' dere was a bright moon dat night, an' jes' as I come along de road, 'bout three miles out, where de swash from Black-Jack Swamp run clos' up to de road, I heered 'de awfulest groans dat I ebber did heer. At fust I was de most scared nigger dat ebber was seen, but den I listen jes' a little an' I foun' out dat de noise came from a little ole cabin back from de road right by de swamp; an' den, putty soon, I see'd dat it wasn' any t'ing bad, only some poor critter dat was hurt mighty awful. So I went ober to de cabin, an' dere I foun' Jupiter a-lyin' flat on his back wid de wust fever dat you ebber did see. I fixed him up as well as I could, an' he tole me all about himself. He was de servant of one of dem Texas ossifers, an' he had bin beat jes' as ef he had bin a dog, an' he'd run away, knowin' dat de regiment was gwine to move afore long, an' dat dey wouldn't be able fur to hunt fur him much. He had bin lyin' in de swamp fur two nights an' de fever got hold of him. You see, he was one of dem niggers from near de Mexikin line, whar dey don't have much fever. He hadn't suffer' much till arter sundown, an' den de ole fever jes' laid him right out. I 'spect he would have bin a dead nigger 'fore long ef I hadn't come along jes' den, like de good Samaritan dat you read 'bout in de Scriptur's. I happen to have a little whisky dat pine burrs had bin steeped in, de best t'ing in de world fur to break de fever, an' wid dat I fotch him along. Arter he got well, an' de Yankees gobbled up Little Rock, he went down dere an' I nebber see'd any t'ing more of him."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TIN TOBACCO-BOX.

"AND that is all that you know about Jupiter?" Texas said, after the negro had finished his story.

"Yes, sar." As the old negro spoke he cast a shrewd glance into the face of the overseer, as if with intent to discover there whether his words were believed or not. The face of Texas was as calm and quiet as usual. Whatever his thoughts might be, they were not to be read in his features.

"And now, Uncle, I will relate to you certain details which you have skipped in your narrative," Texas said.

The old negro looked a little astonished at this, but contented himself with putting on a look of wonder and he'd his peace.

"After the Texas regiment departed, and Jupiter recovered his senses a little, thinking that he was never going to get well and must shortly die, he intrusted a secret to you; did he not?" and as the overseer put the question, he fixed his keen eyes full on the face of the negro.

Uncle Snow was staggered; he did not attempt to deny the fact.

"Fore de Lord, you must be a witch!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no; not a bit of witchcraft about the matter at all," the overseer replied. "Jupiter told me all about it. I am only repeating the story to you so that you will have no doubt in regard to my right to demand the package from you, left by the yellow boy."

"Yes, sar," the old negro said, mechanically. He did not attempt to deny the existence of the package now.

"Now I will repeat what Jupiter said to you. In the first place, he made you swear that you would never reveal what he was going to tell you except as he should dictate. That's right, isn't it?"

"Yes, sar," Uncle Snow answered, an expression of solemnity gathering upon his sable face.

"Then he proceeded to tell you that, passing through the swamp just at sundown, coming back from the bird-traps that he had set, to the ruined cabin where he had taken up his quarters, he came upon what was apparently the dead body of a man. Upon kneeling down by his side he discovered that he had been shot through the breast and was not yet dead, but dying. The man was white and of middle age. He told Jupiter that he had been murdered, and wished him to carry a message to a certain party who might avenge his death. He gave Jupiter his watch and chain, this seal-ring and a hundred dollars in money, all he had, on condition that he would carry a tin tobacco-box and a certain something, that the box contained, to a man in Texas, assuring Jupiter that, upon delivering the box, he would receive a hundred dollars more."

"He nebber tole me a word 'bout dat, sar," the old negro said, quickly; "he nebber said dat he was gwine to git a cert fur guvin' de box up."

"That was the bargain, though," Texas replied. "The murdered man had hardly managed to tell his wishes before he commenced to stiffen in death. Jupiter took the watch and chain, the seal-ring, the money and the tobacco-box; then he scooped a hole in the swamp and buried the body."

"Dat's all correct, sar; true as de Gospel!" exclaimed the negro, earnestly.

"A little while after he told the story to you the fever broke and he commenced to get well. Then, as soon as the river was cleared of the rebel batteries, and the boats commenced to run between Little Rock and the Mississippi, he started on his search for the person in Texas to whom he was to deliver the message left by the dead man. But he did not dare to take the box with him for fear that he might lose it on the way; so he left it with you."

"No, sar!" exclaimed the old darky, quickly; "he didn't guv it to me. 'Fore de Lord, I sw'ar he nebber guv it to me."

A smile curled the lip of the overseer as he cast a shrewd, keen glance at the face of the negro. He detected the evident evasion, and was not thus easily to be thrown off the track or baffled in his purpose.

"He did not give it to you, but he told you where he had concealed the box!"

The old negro stared at the overseer with open mouth. The wily "Man-from-Texas" had guessed the truth and the old Uncle could not gainsay it.

"You see, I understand all about it," the overseer continued, in a tone of confidence. "It is of no use to attempt to deceive me about the matter. The box belongs to me. I am the person in Texas that Jupiter went after."

"But whar has you bin all dis yere time?" the negro asked, astonished.

"A very natural question and one easily explained," Texas replied. "Jupiter got to New Orleans in sixty-four, all right, but he found that if he attempted to get into Texas, then held by the Confederates, in all probability before he had gone ten rods some one would have seized him for an escaped slave. So he waited in New Orleans until the end of the war, and even then he did not dare to venture into the State until the fall and did not arrive at San Antonio—where he expected to find me—until the spring of sixty-six, as his money gave out by the time he got to Galveston and he had been compelled to work his way along. The watch and chain he had been obliged to pawn in New Orleans, and only the seal-ring remained as proof of his statements. When Jupiter finally reached San Antonio, I had just departed for Mexico on business and did not return for a year and a half, so that it was well into sixty-seven before Jupiter and I met. Then I had to settle up some business in San Antonio—a law-suit which I had to attend to in person—and it was well into this spring before Jupiter and myself started for this place. As I told you before, Jupiter was drowned coming up the river, and so I nearly lost all clue to the box; for the yellow boy always manifested a strange reluctance to tell me your name; possibly he was afraid that I might wish to get the box myself from you and so defraud him of the one hundred dollars that he was to receive from me when he placed the package in my hands. He always described you as an old white-haired Uncle, who kept a little store on the outskirts of the village. When I saw you in the court-room, to-day, I had a suspicion that you were the man I was in search of. Now, to convince you that every thing is fair and above-board, I'll make this offer: take me to the place where the box is concealed, open it in my presence, and if from the contents I cannot prove that I am the man that ought to have it, you may keep the box and what it contains yourself. And furthermore: if I prove to your satisfaction that I am the man entitled to the box, you shall have the hundred dollars that were promised to Jupiter."

The eyes of the old darky sparkled. It was an easy way to make so large a sum.

"I reckon dat you is de man, Massa Texas," he said. "I done t'ink dat I ought fur to gib you dat box. It's jes' stowed away like a squirrel hides his nuts fur de winter; yes, sar, it is hid in dat same ole shanty out in de swamp whar Jupiter used fur to lib."

"You have to pass right by General Smith's place to strike the Mulberry creek road, don't you?" the overseer asked.

"Yes, sar."

"Will you meet me where the road turns off to go up to the house, say just a little before daybreak to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, sar, I'll be dar," the old negro responded, promptly. "It's only 'bout a mile back of Massa Ginerel Smith's plantation."

"You'll find me waiting for you."

The overseer rose; Uncle Snow put down the bar of the door, and Texas, bidding him "good-night," walked off in the darkness.

The old darky proceeded up-stairs to bed, considerably astonished in his mind.

As Uncle Snow and the candle emerged into the loft, Jim Crow woke up, with a prolonged yawn.

"Wot's de time, gran'fader?" he asked.

"I s'pect it's arter ten, chile."

"By golly!" cried Jim Crow, jumping up. "I promised to be down at Uncle Ned's place to go arter 'coon at ten. I'se off!"

And the lively young nigger departed in spite of his gran'fader's remonstrances.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LEAGUE OF FOUR.

BLACK-JACK SWAMP by night again, and a moody group of four holding a council by the flickering light of the fire, burning in the center of the rude cabin of the outlaw.

Yell Ozark was stretched at full length upon one of the bear-skins, his hands clasped behind his head.

Fayette and Foxcroft were seated close to the fire on a section of a cottonwood, covered by a skin, forming a rude sort of bench.

King Congo, his face still covered by the bandages, was, like Ozark, extended at full length in a corner on a bear-skin, his feet to the fire, and reclining on his elbow.

The discussion that had been going on had apparently not been particularly pleasant in its nature.

Foxcroft had just finished relating the incidents of the trial before him that day, and he had been interrupted half a dozen times by sarcastic remarks from Fayette and the outlaw, and the Justice finally lost patience.

"Oh, it's all very easy to talk, now that the affair is over!" he exclaimed, angrily. "It is easy now to ask why didn't I do this and why didn't I do that. I did the best I knew how. I tell you, Mr. Fayette, with all your shrewdness and tact, you wouldn't care much to tackle old Judge Yell!"

"Why, Foxcroft!" exclaimed Fayette, impatiently, "can't you see that you've been made a fool of?"

"No, I can't!" replied Foxcroft, indignantly. "It was no joking matter the way the old Judge went for me, and you have knowledge enough of the law, Mr. Fayette, to know that an able lawyer can worry a man like blazes, even if he hasn't got a shadow of right on his side!"

"Why, the whole thing was a perfect farce!" exclaimed Fayette, abruptly. "I'll bet a thousand dollars that it was a made-up joke between Bob Howard and old Judge Yell. The idea of their having a fight in open court; why, it's ridiculous!"

"Well, it may seem ridiculous, but, hang me if it didn't take place," Foxcroft returned, stubbornly. "Congo was there; he saw it. I'll leave it to him! Congo, didn't Bob Howard and the Judge clinch so that it took half a dozen to separate them?"

"Me see 'um!" growled the black, who still felt terribly sore from the effects of the sledge-hammer-like blows of the Man-from-Texas.

"Oh, I tell you it was all made up between the two!" Fayette again cried, in impatience. "They didn't hurt each other; did they?"

"Well, I confess that I don't think that either of the two were marked at all," Foxcroft replied, "but, you see, we pulled them apart before they got a chance to damage each other any; but Johnson, the sheriff, has got marks; he's got two of the most beautiful black eyes that you ever saw."

There was a tone of triumph in Foxcroft's voice as he made this statement. He knew that there was no disputing the truth of that.

"It's a mighty strange affair, take it altogether," Fayette

grumbled, and then he turned to Congo. "And how was it in regard to you and this overseer?" he asked. "I thought that you were a fighting man? From what I've heard, it seems to me that this fellow handled you as if you had been a big boy instead of a man."

The negro gave utterance to a growl of rage. The pain of his bruises seemed to redouble when he thought of the unceremonious way in which the overseer had battered him about.

"Me dunno," he said, sullenly; "he no stan' still an' luff me smash 'um. When me strike he jump back 'fore me put han's up, an' smash me in de face two, t'ree times, all togedder. Me dunno how to do it; he so quick, me no see. Me kill 'um some time, dough!" And from the manner in which the negro hissed the words between his teeth, it was perfectly apparent that he fully meant to execute his threat.

Fayette's lips curled as he listened to the menace of the giant black. From the specimen that he had seen of the skill of The-Man-from-Texas, he easily realized that the overseer was perfectly competent to take care of himself, and that at the game they were playing, the old adage was likely to be proven true, that "Jack was as good as his master."

"Well, that nicely contrived plan has gone to smash," Fayette said; "so we must think of another. By the way, Ozark," and he turned abruptly to the outlaw, "how about the school-teacher? Have you warned her to leave yet? I heard that Lieutenant Winnie was seen riding through the village to-night."

"I called on the gal an' jis' tole her that she would have to git up an' git," Ozark answered.

Fayette detected a peculiar tone in the outlaw's voice as he spoke, and a sudden suspicion flashed into his mind that, possibly, Ozark had not succeeded any better in his plan than Congo and Foxcroft had in theirs.

"Well, what did she say? I suppose that she was frightened out of her wits and promised to go at once, eh?" Fayette asked, although he didn't suppose any such thing.

"Not by a dog-goned sight!" cried Ozark, abruptly. "I reckon I hain't got any thing more to boast of than my partners over thar. I'll tell you all about it. You see, I layed in the bush till this durned lieutenant lit out. I knew that some one was inside with the gal, 'cos there was a hoss fastened to the fence, an', nat'rally, I suspicioned that it was the sodjer. When he came out I had half a mind to try a crack at him, 'spite of what you said, but I was afeard of these pop-gun revolvers; they ain't good fur much 'less you're right alongside of a man, an' I were a good fifty feet off. So I jes' lay quiet an' let him ride off; then I walked into the house jes' as if I was a-goin' to eat the gal up, body an' boots; but she wa'n't a mite skeered, an' talked back to me as sarcy as yer please. Arter I had talked to her a while, an' tried fur to skeer her a bit, like a fool, I shoved my revolver back into my belt, an' then the furst thing I knowed she had a pop-gun out from the drawer of the table an' leveled at my breast. She had me dead to rights, fur sure. Gentlemen, it's the only time in my life that I ever felt skeered; but, to have it go 'round through this hyer State that I, Yell Ozark, the Arkansas outlaw, who has fit the United States Government ever since the war, single-handed, had bin shot an' killed, jes' fur all the world like a durned long-tailed rat in a trap, by a woman—why, gentlemen, I believe my ghost would walk these hyer swamps to the judgment day ef I were to die that way!"

Ozark spoke very gravely; it was evident that he was fully in earnest.

"How did the affair end?" Fayette demanded; "you are not dead yet, I see."

"Oh, she didn't offer to shoot; all she said that she wanted was for me to promise not to trouble her any more," Ozark replied. "She had me, I tell yer! I saw shoot in her eyes every time. I knew that if I as much as moved my little finger, she'd put a ball plum through me. I weakened and gi'e in, like a man ought to when he's perfectly satisfied that he's got all he wants. I said that I wouldn't tech her, an' left; an' no more I won't, Fayette. I les' wash my hands of that yere school-teacher. I'll clean out every other durned nigger-teacher in the county; but that 'little gal kin teach hyer jes' as long as she likes for all of me. I don't take any more stock in any thing consarned with her."

"It seems to me that we have been making the most successful lot of failures so far in this matter, that I have ever heard of," Fayette remarked, grimly.

"You hit it plum center that time," was Ozark's opinion.

"Can't you suggest some other plans?" asked Foxcroft, anxiously. "I own for my part that I am rather glad the girl is to stay, although I wish that the lieutenant could be induced to get out."

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW TO FIX THE OVERSEER.

OZARK burst out into a hearty laugh at Foxcroft's speech. "Hear the ole fat cuss!" he exclaimed. "I'll bet a bale of cotton ag'in' a coon's skin thet he's bin shinnin' up to the spunky leetle gal himself!"

"Well, what if I have?" demanded Foxcroft, indignantly; "I believe that that is my business and no one else's, isn't it? I didn't make any objections when it was proposed to drive her away. I didn't attempt to interfere against the general wish. I sacrificed my own feelings for the benefit of the rest—you, Yell Ozark, in particular."

"Oh, come now, Foxcroft, own up!" Fayette cried. "You didn't make any objections because you thought that the girl would come to you for assistance, and then you could do what you liked with her. Wasn't that the reason, eh?"

"Oh, he's jes' a sly old coon!" exclaimed Ozark, with a loud laugh.

"Gentlemen, if my motives are to be misunderstood in this way, I shall not take the trouble to attempt to change your opinions," Foxcroft answered, with a great deal of dignity, and with an attempt to put on an air of injured innocence, which was not particularly successful, and which only made Fayette smile sarcastically, while Ozark laughed outright.

"But come, we must to business, boys," said Fayette, abruptly; "we must try again."

"It will never do to give it up so, Mister Brown!"

Ozark chanted at the top of his voice.

"These two men, the overseer and Lieutenant Winnie, must be started out of this county," Fayette continued.

"Let me lay for both on 'em with my double-barrel," suggested the swamp ruffian.

"I told you before that that plan wouldn't work," exclaimed Fayette, impatiently. "It would bring such a hue and cry down upon us that it would make the county too hot to hold us."

"They've bin a-chasin' me ever since the war, and they hain't got me yit!" Ozark said, doggedly.

"The pitcher that goes often to the well will be broken at last," Fayette replied, coldly. "We don't want bravado just now, Ozark; we want a little good sound sense. First, for the lieutenant, I saw him last night when he rode through the town; he and Gol Adair were together, and I took occasion to have a little conversation with Adair, after the lieutenant left him. I commenced by stating that I had seen the lieutenant, and hinted to Gol that since Winnie was down here, it would be a good idea to make another attempt to capture you, Ozark; and to make short work of a long conversation, I told Adair plainly that I was sure he could lead a party to your hiding-place in the swamp, and offered him a hundred dollars to do the job. Adair came right out flat-footed, and declared that he wouldn't have any thing to do with it for fifty hundred; said he had something better to do than to turn himself into 'a dog-goned blood-hound,' and further added that the lieutenant had other fish to fry, just now, too. He felt perfectly sure that Winnie at present wouldn't go ten steps out of his way to capture all the outlaws from St. Louis to New Orleans. Now, for my part, I am convinced we haven't any thing to fear from Winnie at the present; but there are only two peaceable ways to get rid of him. The first is to let both him and the girl alone, then they will get married and start off."

"I object to that; I want her myself," Foxcroft put in, sulkily.

"The second," continued Fayette, without taking the slightest notice of the interruption, "is for Foxcroft to take the girl away from him, either by making fiercer love to her than the soldier is able to do, or else by contriving to produce a quarrel between the two, in some way; but this matter concerns you, Foxcroft, more than it does the rest of us. Of course we stand ready to help you in any way you may think necessary."

A grunt of satisfaction came from the store-keeper, and a cunning look appeared in his little eyes.

"And as for the overseer, we must go for him again. I think that we had better try a little Ku-Klux on him," Fayette observed, thoughtfully.

"Come the Grand Cyclops—beware! on him?" said Ozark.

"Exactly; the only difficulty is to get at him."

"Maybe ketch him in de store-house, some night, dat's lonely," Congo suggested, for the first time taking part in the conversation.

"That is a good idea," Fayette replied. "The store-house is a lonely spot. We must arrange it so as to spring the trap upon the overseer some night when Smith is away from the plantation; and if the darkies should hear a noise—that is, supposing the overseer shows fight and makes a struggle—the mere sight of the black gowns will be enough to frighten them into fits."

"We can get Smith into town easy enough," observed Foxcroft. "Get your father to send him a message that he wants to see him about the mortgage, some night."

"That is simple enough. The most difficult part of the matter will be to decoy the overseer to the store-house," said Fayette. "Are there any blacks on the Smith place that you think you can depend upon, Congo?"

"Yes, two on 'em."

"We can fix it then," Fayette observed, in a tone of confidence.

"What are you going to do with the overseer arter you trap him?" asked Ozark.

"Tell him that the air of this place is bad for his health, and that he had better leave," replied Fayette, significantly.

"And if he won't promise to go?" asked Foxcroft.

"Take him out in the woods and treat him to a dose of cowhide administered on the bare back until he does promise."

"Congo lay on whip!" exclaimed the burly negro, with a ferocious glee.

"That's settled, clean as the trunk of a gum," announced Ozark, in a tone of satisfaction. "You must gi'n me plenty of warning when you want me fur to jine in this hyer cow-sillion, 'cos I've got a leetle business up to the Line Ferry on Mulberry crick comin' off afore long."

"What business have you got there?" asked Fayette, in astonishment.

"They're gwine to sell the ferry privilege fur next year commencing furst of May, at auction. I used to row the ferry, you know, afore the war; an' I thought maybe that I would go up an' gi'n 'em a bid," Ozark answered.

"You can't run the ferry yourself," said Foxcroft; "the soldiers would be after you in no time."

"I know that well enough, but ef I kin buy the privilege cheap mebbe I kin sell it out fur a profit. It's worth fifty dollars a year sure. Anyway, I'm gwine up; I want to see the folks up thar an' I'll gi'n one bid, jes' fur luck. Johnson, the sheriff, is the auctioneer, I hearn," Ozark replied.

"After we get the overseer out of the way, we'll go for Smith," Fayette now added. "I've made up my mind that his place shall come under the hammer as soon as the law will allow. Old Smith will never be able to raise the money to pay the mortgage, and the chances are just ten to one that if a sale is forced, the whole plantation won't bring even the face of the mortgage, for times are hard and money is scarce."

"The place ought to be worth fifteen or twenty thousand dollars though, hadn't it?" asked Foxcroft.

"Oh, yes, every cent of it; but, times are tight. Those who have the money mean to hold on to it. Things will work all right for us if we get the overseer out of the way."

Foxcroft, gazing into the fire thoughtfully, did not notice the look of intelligence that passed between Fayette and the outlaw.

Just then a shrill whistle rung out over the surface of the lark lagoon, coming from the swamp shore.

CHAPTER XXX.

JIM CROW.

ALL four of the outlaws started at the sound.

"It's all right!" exclaimed Ozark; "it's that young imp. He's got something to say, or he wouldn't come at this time. I'll go fur him in the dug-out."

The outlaw left the shanty, and his confederates soon heard the light dip of his paddle in the waters of the dark lagoon.

Within five minutes Ozark was back again, accompanied by a light "yellow boy," about fifteen years old, with crispy, curly hair, and an expression of low cunning upon his irregular, evil-looking features.

"Hello, Jim Crow!" exclaimed Fayette, as the mulatto stepped within the circle of light; "what brings you here?"

It was the grandson of old Uncle Snow who had entered the abode of the outlaw.

"I came arter you, Massa Fayette," the boy replied, with a grin. "I see'd you, and Massa Foxcroft dere walk down de street 'bout nine dis evening, an' I spected dat you was gwine to come to dis yere place to see Massa Ozark."

"What do you want?" Fayette asked, totally unable to guess the boy's purpose in seeking him in the swamp at such an hour.

"Does you know dat Massa Texas, Ginerel Smith's overeer?" the boy asked.

All were astonished at this question, and even King Congo pricked up his ears to listen.

"Yes, of course I know him; what of it?" Fayette demanded.

"He come to see my gran'fader to night. I was up sta'rs jes' gwine fur to sleep when he come in. I heerd him tell de ole man dat he had somet'ing ticular to say to him dat he didn't want nobody fur to hear; so when de ole man come up, I made out dat I was fas' asleep, an' I jes' heerd de 'hole on it. Dere was a yaller nigger named Jupiter an' he left a tin box full of somet'ing wid de ole man for dis yere Massa Texas fur to come and git, an' he's gwine to giv de ole man a hundred dollar fur it; an' it's somet'ing to do wid a gemman dat was killed in de war-time afore de Yanks come, an' de overseer, Massa Texas, an' my ole man is gwine arter de box de furst t'ing in de morning, afore de sun am up."

Fayette and Ozark had exchanged glances when he had spoken of a man being killed, but neither Foxcroft ne Congo, intent on the boy's story, had noticed the evident understanding.

"Where is the box concealed?" Fayette asked.

"In de ole cabin on de Mulberry crick road, right on de edge ob de swamp," Jim Crow answered.

"I know the place!" exclaimed Ozark; "I've slept there a hundred times."

"Yes, I know where it is situated, too; I have noticed it when I have been riding by on the road," Fayette said, abstractedly, evidently lost in reflection. Then he raised his head and addressed the boy. "Did you hear them say where about in the cabin the box was hidden?"

"No, sar."

"We kin find it easy 'nough!" asserted the outlaw. "Thar ain't nothing to the cabin but four walls; a mud-floor an' part of a roof."

"I t'ought maybe dat dere might be somet'ing good in dat yere box dat you'd like fur to have, an' so I done come to tell you all 'bout it," the boy said.

"Jim Crow, you're jes' the smartest little nig that thar is in this yere county!" exclaimed Ozark. "Ef you keep on, you'll be hung, sure."

The yellow-boy grinned at the dubious compliment.

"Ozark, I reckon that you and I had better go after this box; it may contain something of importance; and then again, it may not amount to any thing at all. It will do no harm, though, to look after it," said Fayette. "I suppose, Foxcroft, that you don't care to tramp five or six miles in the swamp?" The fat store-keeper shuddered at the idea.

"Bless me, no!" he cried. "It is quite bad enough to tramp out here, without trying my luck any further in the swamp. I always contrive to step into some cursed mud-hole that I never discover until I am up to my knees in water. And then, to-night, I came within an inch of treading on a black snake that looked as big round as my arm."

"Nuffin but a common black snake; they don't bite," Ozark said.

"How the deuce was I to know?" demanded Foxcroft, sharply; "I didn't stop to ask him whether he'd bite or not; I couldn't have jumped any higher if it had been a rattlesnake, or a moccasin; and when I came down, I lost my balance and went over flat on my back in a nest of brambles that nearly tore me all to pieces. I repeat what I said when I came here before: I am not coming here again if I can help myself."

"We'll try and arrange that all right," Fayette remarked.

"You can go back to town; while Ozark and I will proceed to the cabin, and search for the tin box."

"Yes; Jim Crow here can guide me through the swamp; I should never find my way alone," Foxcroft said. "Of course if there are any valuables in the box, I depend upon you to give me a fair share."

Fayette and Ozark exchanged a meaning glance again.

"Certainly," Fayette said.

"Of course," Ozark added; "and if you ain't satisfied, mebbe I'll throw in some of my share, too," and then the outlaw indulged in a "horse" laugh, much to the surprise of Foxcroft, who didn't see any thing funny in the observation; but he was too well used to the peculiar moods of the ruffian to question him.

"Oh, so," he answered; "I shall be perfectly satisfied with my own share without robbing you."

Ozark ferried over Foxcroft and Jim Crow and returned for Fayette, leaving King Congo in solitary possession of the swamp lair, there to nurse his bruises and meditate dire vengeance upon the strong-armed Man-from-Texas.

Concealing the dug-out amid the brush that fringed the lagoon, Ozark and Fayette proceeded in a north-west direction through the swamp.

Foxcroft and Jim Crow had gone off toward the landing, leading to the south-west.

Ozark led the way; he had the catlike faculty of seeing in the dark, and Fayette followed close behind, treading Indian fashion, in his footsteps.

"How far is it?" asked Fayette.

"'Bout two miles."

"I thought it couldn't be much further. I said five, though, to frighten off Foxcroft. I knew that he would never stand a tramp like that. You think that we can discover the box?"

"I reckon we kin. I've got a chunk of fat-wood that we kin light with a match. I think I know whar it's hid. The last time I bunked in thar, I noticed a hole in one of the logs nigh a corner of the cabin, jes' as if a big grub had bored it out. I reckon that it was a human, though."

"I say, Ozark, what do you suppose that tin box contains?" asked Fayette, abruptly.

"A bill of sale of a horse, or something of that kind, with your name and mine scratched on the back of it," Ozark suggested.

"You think, then, that the overseer, Texas, is the son of —" and Fayette hesitated.

"Of that Texan drover that you an' me knew in sixty-three?" asked Ozark, bluntly, finishing the speech of the other.

"He does look like him," Fayette observed.

"I noticed the resemblance the moment I set eyes on the cuss that night, in Gol Adair's cabin; an' when I heard him tell what foted him hyer, I reckoned that thar was trouble ahead."

Very few more words passed between the two until they emerged from the swamp and stood in the moonlight before the deserted cabin.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

AFTER leaving old Uncle Snow's shanty the overseer proceeded straight to the plantation. The moon was now rising slowly, and lighted up his homeward way.

"To-morrow the paper will be in my hands," Texas thought, as he strode onward with vigorous steps, "and then I shall be able to close the account, perhaps. There's no telling, though, but that the party whose name I shall find traced in characters of blood, is dead or gone far away from here. Speculation now is only idle guess-work. In the morning, an hour after sunrise, I shall know the truth."

It did not take the overseer very long with his lengthy legs to get over the distance between Uncle Snow's cabin and the plantation.

Not a living soul did he meet along the road, and, as he came up the carriage-way leading to the house, he saw the light coming from the window of General Smith's library, which proved that the owner of the plantation had not yet retired to rest.

The library was on the first floor, and, with his eyes fixed upon the lighted window as he advanced, Texas did not notice the white-robed figure keeping its vigil at the window on the second story.

Missouri had watched and waited for the return of the overseer.

She saw him come up the avenue, heard him enter the house and ascend the stairs to his room, then heard the noise of the door as he closed it behind him, and after that, silence reigned supreme.

Missouri, sitting in a low rocking-chair by the open window, resting her head upon her hand, gazed out dreamily upon the rising moon and reflected.

That the thoughts of the girl were not very pleasant was evident from the slight frown that arched her brows and shut the lips so tightly together.

"Where has he been, I wonder?" she murmured, tapping her slippered foot petulantly upon the floor. "He went toward the landing, I am sure. I wonder if he went to see some girl?" And then, the frown upon her face deepened, and the full, red under lip was compressed spitefully between the little white teeth. "It's no business of mine, I suppose, but I *would* like to know, though." Then she rose to her feet and walked up and down the room for a few minutes with a restless, impatient motion.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed, suddenly, "I suppose that I had better go to bed. I wish that I had never seen this fellow; he annoys me dreadfully, and he's only an overseer too. I wish that Will Fayette or some other gentleman had been riding out that morning to pull me out of the river. This fellow, too, doesn't seem to understand that it is quite a condescension for me to treat him as politely as I do; he doesn't seem to notice it at all. If I was as black as the ace of spades instead of being a pretty girl, as every one says I am, he couldn't take less notice of me."

Then Missouri walked to the swinging glass of the bureau; the rays of the rising moon, growing stronger and brighter each coming minute, shone into the apartment and gave light enough to enable the girl to see her face in the glass.

"I'm not so ugly, I know!" she mused. "I wonder if this is the best way to wear my hair?" she murmured, in a way that plainly betrayed profound thought, and resting both elbows on the bureau she gazed pensively into the glass for a few moments, while she pondered over the important question.

Then with a sudden motion, she raised her hands and removing the hair-pins allowed the magnificent jet-black tresses to stream down over her shoulders.

"That is the way I looked when—" then the girl paused and blushed up to her temples; she was annoyed that one subject ran ever in her thoughts. "What a goose I am!" she exclaimed, petulantly. "I really believe that I am bewitched. I can think of nothing but of being pulled out of the water by this fellow. I wish that he had let me stay where I was. I'd better go to bed!" And with this abrupt declaration, Missouri proceeded at once to disrobe.

But, even when attired for slumber, and kneeling in prayer by the bedside, the image of the red-coated overseer would come to her despite her determination not to think of him.

Missouri's slumbers, that night, were light and broken. With the first shrill crow of trumpet-tongued chanticleer, the herald of the coming morn, the girl awoke. Turning over restlessly on her side, she endeavored to compose herself to sleep again, and, just as she had closed her eyes with intent to woo the presence of balmy slumber's chain, the opening of a door, followed by the cautious tread of a man's footsteps, caught her attention. She sat bolt upright in bed and listened for a moment. Her ears had not deceived her; she heard the step of the overseer.

"Why, it is not yet light," she murmured; "where can he be going at this hour?"

To jump up and wrap a loose robe around her was but the work of a second; then she sprung to the window, her little white feet pattering almost noiselessly upon the floor-matting.

She heard the stairs creak under the descending tread; heard the man unlock the front door—the key of the massive old fashioned lock always shrieked as if in torture when it turned in the wards—and then descend the steps, and watched him as in the dull gray light—almost as thick as the gloom of the night—he walked down the carriage-way toward the main road.

Missouri watched him until he was out of sight. Great was the wonder in the young girl's mind. No sleep for her that morning. She dressed herself, and a hundred times she put the mental question, "What *does* it mean?"

The overseer proceeded straight down to the road, and at the junction of the private way with the main one, he found old Uncle Snow waiting for him.

"Good-mornin', sar," said the negro, touching his hat politely. "I's on time you see, sar."

"Yes; I'm a little later than I intended," Texas replied; "let's paddle ahead at once."

Onward the two went, at a pretty brisk pace. The old negro was a good walker, despite his age.

Just as the streaks of light were beginning to line the eastern skies, the two came in sight of the deserted cabin by the borders of the swamp.

"Dar she am!" exclaimed the black, pointing to the house.

"I never thought to bring a light," Texas said.

"I did, sar," Uncle Snow said; "I's got de end ov a candle an' some matches in my pocket."

The two entered the old ruin. The negro lighted the bit of candle, then went to the north-west corner of the cabin.

"Here it am, sar," he said, getting down on his knees and examining the lower log.

Texas bent over him. He noticed a small cavity in the log, but it did not seem to be over an inch deep.

"Is that it?" he asked, pointing to the hollow in the log.

"No, sar," the negro answered; "dat is only fur to mark de place whar de box is, in case we done forgit it."

Then the negro dug his nails into the bark of the log about three inches from the hollow spot, and pulled up a piece of bark about four inches long by two wide, which revealed a little cavity underneath, in which reposed a tin tobacco-box.

The manner in which the hiding-place had been arranged was simple enough. A piece of bark had been carefully cut out, the cavity dug out underneath, and then the bark had been returned to its former place and firmly pressed down.

"Dar she am, safe and soun'!" exclaimed the old negro, in triumph.

"Now, Uncle Snow, before I open the box I'll write my full name on this card," and Texas took a card and pencil from his pocket and scribbled a name on it. "In the box we'll find a paper, and when you read it you'll see that it belongs to me."

"All right, sar."

Then Texas took the box from its hiding-place and opened it, while the old negro looked on with eyes widely distended.

A cry of surprise came from both of the two.

The box only contained a few little scraps of torn paper, evidently the remains of a letter, and from the whiteness of the paper it was clear that it had not been in the box any length of time.

"Fore de Lord!" exclaimed the negro, in wonder, "some one has been hyer afore us!"

"Yes, it looks like it," Texas said, dryly.

"Massa Texas, I hope I may die dis bressed min'te if I ebber touch de t'ing," the old negro said, solemnly. The thought had occurred to him that perhaps the overseer would imagine he had tampered with the box.

"That's all right, Uncle Snow, as far as you're concerned," Texas said, thoughtfully; "but *some one* evidently has been at it. These scraps of paper don't amount to much, but whoever left them in the box has got possession of the paper that was originally hidden there. He's a blind idiot, whoever he may be; evidently his idea was that, when the box was found, the scraps of paper would lead to the belief that they were the remains of the original document; but they may serve as a clue for me to find out who has rifled the box." Then Texas closed up the box and put it in his pocket.

"I say, Massa Texas!" exclaimed the negro, suddenly, "s'pose you look outside; mebbe you mought find some tracks fur to tell you who's bin hyer."

Texas shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't know about that," he said; "we tramped in without any caution, and it will be difficult to distinguish other footmarks—~~if~~ there be any—from our own. But I'll look, though."

The search was fruitless, even in the rapidly strengthening light of the morning.

"It's no use," Texas declared; "we might as well make tracks for home. We're clean beat, in this game."

The two proceeded to retrace their steps, each vainly speculating as to who had discovered the hiding-place of the box.

At the plantation, Texas parted with the negro, with a caution not to mention any thing about the affair to any one.

Old Uncle Snow trudged down the road toward the town.

"Fore de Lord, I t'ought dat dis yere ole nigger was gwine to git dat hundred dollars, fur sure!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

STUMPING THE SQUIRREL.

Down on a fallen tree-trunk, close to the ferry over the Catfish, sat Gol Adair, Lieutenant Winnie and Dutch Pete.

The three were only a yard or so from the hollow tree known far and wide as "Gol Adair's Bank," wherciu, through the knot-hole in the trunk, the passers over the ferry deposited their fare.

Doubt and wonder were on the faces of the trio.

On Gol Adair's knee sat the squirrel who acted as paying teller of the bank.

Even the squirrel seemed bewildered and downcast.

Gol Adair was lecturing the little animal with upraised forefinger, while Winnie and Pete looked on in silence.

A wonderful event had occurred. For the first time, Gol Adair's "bank" had "suspended," and refused to honor his demand.

The squirrel had descended as usual after the twenty-five-cent fare that Texas had told Gol he had deposited in the knot-hole before passing over the flat-boat ferry with Missouri, on the morning he had rescued her from the close embrace of the yellow Arkansas, and the squirrel had come up out of the tree with "nary stamp," as Gol had expressed it.

The little animal had evidently "gone back" on his master. It was apparent that the squirrel was beginning to get the idea in his head that he was cashier instead of paying teller, and had a right to run the bank as he "durned please."

"Look a-hyer now, nimble-legs; this ain't a-gwine to work!" exclaimed Gol, who had made up his mind to reason seriously with his bright-eyed, bushy-tailed servant. "It's played out now, fur sure; I know that thar's a deposit of twenty-five cents in that yere bank, an' it ain't no use fur you to dive down an' then come back an report that thar ain't nary red thar. I know better, I tell yer!"

"Perhaps some one else has been here and got it out," suggested Winnie.

"Tain't possible!" Gol exclaimed; "it can't be did! And then a sudden idea struck him. "By hookey!" he cried, "s'pose some nosouled critter has bin trainin' another squirrel on a knot-hole bank?"

"That would be a joke!" said Winnie, laughing.

"If that's so, my institution is bu'sted," Gol remarked, very seriously. "This hyer bank will never stand two a-drawin' on't. I'll either hev to sell out or shoot the other critter."

"Did Texas tell you that he had put the ferriage in the tree?" Winnie asked.

"If he didn't, I dreamed it," Gol replied, dubiously.

"What did he tell you he put in?"

"Twenty-five cents."

"A stamp?"

"Of course! What else would he put in?" Gol demanded, in wonder.

"Why, he might have put in a silver piece."

"Oh, thunder!" exclaimed Gol, suddenly; "I never thought of that. So he might, an' this leetle no-eared, bushy-tailed critter was trained on stamps. I reckon he wouldn't know 'nough fur to bring up a quarter if thar were a heap down in thar. Silver is so mighty skeerce that I never reckoned that any one would make a specie deposit in this hyer bank."

"I'll bet you a dollar that that is what Texas put in. They use a good deal of gold and silver where he came from, even now," said Winnie. "I remember, too, I heard coins jingle in his pocket as he sat down that night in your cabin."

"I reckon you're right, an' you don't get nary dollar out of this chile on a sure thing," Gol replied.

"S'pose you drop 'nother quarter in and make squirrel fetch—how's dat?" Pete asked, for the first time taking part in the conversation.

"I swow that is a good idea!" the old hunter exclaimed. "Now, Pete, you don't say much, but when you do talk, it's chunks of solid wisdom. Gi'n us your quarter," and Gol stuck out his hand to the German, winking at Winnie as he did so.

"Nein; me no got so mooch," Pete said, with a stolid face. Winnie laughed outright. "Euchered!" he exclaimed; "old man, you can't get Pete's quarter on deposit in *that* bank!"

"What in thunder is the use of making a motion ef he can't carry it out?" demanded Gol, with a comical grin.

"I've got a big penny in my pocket," said Winnie. "That will do for the experiment."

"Oh, go a silver quarter, leftenant, an' kinder encourage the little critter," Gol said, with a sober face.

"No; the cent is just as good," Winnie replied; "I don't care to take any more stock in your bank than I can help."

The young soldier rose to his feet and tossed the penny in through the hole in the tree.

Then the squirrel was dispatched on his mission, but, after a minute or two, he came out of the hole empty-handed.

"That's it, by thunder!" cried Gol; "he's been trained on stamps, an' don't understand that silver an' copper air valuables. I see that I will have to commence his eddication over again, or else git another squirrel an' train him on silver."

Then Pete rose suddenly to his feet and cast his rifle into the hollow of his arm. All three of the men were armed, as they had been after ducks down the river that morning.

"Good-by; me comes back soon," the German said.

"Whar yer bound?" demanded Gol.

"Walk!" was the lad's laconic reply.

"Down to see Tilda, eh?"

"Maybe."

"Wal, look out for that ring-tailed wild-cat, Yell Ozark; he's squintin' arter Tilda himself," said Gol, warningly.

"Me look; not 'fraid if he was der tuyvel," Pete returned, as he walked off down the river.

"That boy's clear grit from his head to his big toe!" Gol ejaculated, in admiration; after Pete had got out of hearing.

"I would feel a mighty sight easier 'bout him, though, if that pesky varmint, Yell Ozark, was run out of the country."

"I don't think that he'll be around much longer," Winnie said. "General Smith told me when I was in Little Rock, about a week ago, that he was going to send a squad after Ozark very soon, with orders not to return until they got him."

"I don't hanker after blood much, but a wild beast like Ozark ain't fit to live," Gol said, gravely.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE "LINE FERRY."

It was on a bright and pleasant April morning that Sheriff Johnson started for the county seat of Franklin, to sell the lease of the ferry franchise across Mulberry creek, to the highest bidder, according to the law in such cases made and provided.

Johnson was mounted on the same mettled animal which had manifested such decided aversion to Judge Yell's umbrella, as has been related; and, as on this occasion it was fresh from the stable, and naturally in high spirits, it betrayed the playful nature of its disposition by shying at every possible object along the road that it could, with any degree of reason, pretend to be afraid of.

The natural consequence was that, for the first two miles, "Mister" Johnson swore like a trooper, dug his heels into the horse's sides and jerked on the bit so vigorously, that half the time the horse was dancing along sideways like a crab, every now and then elevating its hind legs in the air in a very spiteful manner, and betraying a disposition to get rid of its rider, by rubbing him off against a convenient tree, every now and then.

Wherefore, Johnson and the horse both arrived at the county seat, sweating profusely, and each one equally disgusted with the other.

The county seat was not a particularly large place; it numbered possibly a hundred and fifty inhabitants, black and white—men, women and children all told.

The court-house was a small one-story building, elegantly "painted" with whitewash, and boasting a "liberty-pole" in the open space before the door.

As Johnson and the horse came dancing along into the settlement, the people generally came out to greet the sheriff; Johnson was well known.

Quite a number of men were assembled, evidently waiting for the sheriff's arrival.

Johnson dismounted and fastened the horse.

"You durned brute, I'll sell you, furst thing you know, ef you ain't keerful!" exclaimed the official, in wrath, addressing the animal.

Johnson's eyes had resumed their normal hue, and he displayed no mark of his unfortunate and sudden collision with Judge Yell's umbrella in Justice Foxcroft's court.

"What's the matter, Johnson?" exclaimed one of the bystanders; "you look riled!"

"Well, I reckon you'd look riled ef you had to ride a hoss that wanted to walk on his hind legs all the time," Johnson retorted, savagely.

"How's things workin' up to the landing?" asked another one of the little group.

"Bus'ness dull, an' money's skeerce," answered the sheriff, laconically. "Now, gentlemen, ef you'll jes' git off them yere steps, an' gi'n me a show for my money, we'll come to bus'ness."

The loungers on the steps of the court-house got up slowly and made way for the sheriff, who mounted the steps while the little crowd gathered round him.

Johnson drew a legal-looking document from his pocket and went ahead with the auction.

"Now, fellow-citizens, I'm going to offer at public sale, 'cording to law, the lease of the ferry privilege over Mulberry crick, known to you all as the 'Line Ferry,' and which will be sold to the highest bidder. Now, gents, let me hear from you; how much am I offered?"

Just then a new-comer attracted the little throng and interrupted the sale.

Round the corner of the court-house, from what was known as the East Road, rode Yell Ozark, mounted on a large gray mule, and carrying his double-barrel shot-gun across his lap, the hammers of both barrels drawn back, ready for action.

Yell approached so quietly up the road that he was upon the crowd before they knew it, and about the first intimation that Johnson had of the presence of the dreaded outlaw was seeing him halt directly in front of him, not twenty feet away.

Johnson turned pale; he held the ferry lease in his right hand and made a motion with it toward the pocket of his coat as if with intent to draw a weapon.

The crowd took in the situation at a glance, and anticipating trouble, began to edge away from the steps, so as to get out of range of the terrible "double-barrel."

Ozark's quick eyes, too, had noticed the motion, and fully understood the only half-formed purpose of the sheriff.

"How do you do, Mister Johnson?" exclaimed the ruffian, nodding to the sheriff. "I hope I see you well? I say, Johnson, you hain't got any idee of drawin' a we'pon on me, air you? 'cos you ought to know that I could put a ball plum through you afore you could git any we'pon out. Have you got any fuss with me?"

"No, of course not, Mr. Ozark," replied Johnson, quickly, a long breath of relief coming from his lips and his face brightening up when he discovered that the outlaw had not sought him with hostile intent.

"I reckon that thar ain't any gentleman hyer that's got any fuss with me, is thar?" demanded the horseman, looking round upon the crowd with a smile upon his sallow features. "'Cos ef thar is, all he's got to do is to step out, draw his we'pon, an' we kin settle it now as well as any other time."

But one and all of the crowd assured Mr. Ozark that they entertained the most friendly sentiments toward him, and, strange to relate, two-thirds of the throng assembled there before the court-house spoke the truth. Composed as it was of "poor whites," nearly all of them looked upon Ozark as a sort of persecuted man.

"For my part, I ain't got anythin' ag'in' any one hyer," added Ozark; "I jes' rode into town to attend this hyer auction, an' make a bid for the ferry, mebbe. Now, Mister Johnson, go ahead with your sale."

The crowd looked at one another; they began to understand why the outlaw had ridden into the county seat that bright April morning.

Johnson repeated the announcement in regard to the sale, and again asked:

"How much do I hear for the ferry lease?"

"Two dollars!" shouted Yell, at the top of his voice, and then, quick as a flash, he snatched the double-barreled gun up from his lap, and with his finger on the trigger, poised the barrel on his left hand. "I bid two dollars for this

yere ferry lease, an' I'd like to see the man who dares to bid ag'in' me!"

The members of the crowd around the steps, and the sheriff on them, looked a little uneasy at the threatening attitude of the ruffian, but, as he made no further motion, little by little their composure returned to them.

"Come, go ahead with the sale, Johnson!" Yell exclaimed; "dog-gone ef I want fur to stay hyer in the hot sun all day!"

Thus encouraged, the sheriff proceeded.

"How much am I offered—two dollars—two dollars—do I hear any more?—two dollars!"

But Johnson might have yelled two dollars until he was gray; not one of that crowd would top the bid of Yell Ozark, backed by the awful double-barreled shot-gun.

"Two dollars! Why, gentlemen, it's worth fifty at the least. I can't knock it down for two dollars!" Johnson said.

"Look hyer, Johnson, I don't want to have any fuss with you," Ozark remarked, quietly; "but I stand on my rights. You're to sell this hyer ferry lease to the highest bidder. I've bid two dollars, an' if thar ain't anybody bids over that, 'cording to law, you've got to knock that lease down to me."

This terse and forcible argument was quite enough for Johnson; and, after a few more calls, the "Line" ferry lease was knocked down to Yell Ozark for the sum of two dollars. And that gentleman immediately resold it to Billy Brown, who was running the ferry then, for fifty-two dollars, invited the crowd, including Sheriff Johnson, to take a drink with him, which they all did, and then rode out of town.

Johnson found himself quite an object of interest when he got back to the landing, and related the particulars of the auction.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SMITH DEFINES HIS POSITION.

ABOUT three days after the one on which the auction had taken place, General Smith and his overseer sat out on the prairie together, smoking. It was just after supper, and the twilight was beginning to thicken into the gloom of night.

The General had just been imparting the way his affairs stood to the overseer. The first of May was approaching very rapidly, and as yet he saw no way out of the quicksand of debt in which he was engulfed.

"I owe old Fayette about four thousand dollars, due the first of next month," he said, "and, even if he is willing to let the principal stand, I must pay the back interest, and that is a thousand dollars sure, and maybe a little over. Then, for seed, tools and supplies, I owe five hundred more. That, of course, don't press me like the other, but I ought to pay a little on it next month. I've got supplies enough to last the hands and stock till the first of August, I think; but, even if I tide over to then, I shall be floored without I can raise a little money someway."

"Get an advance on crop," suggests Texas.

"I have already had a thousand dollars," exclaimed the General, impatiently; "I ran so far behind last year that I had to get the money, even before the crop was in the ground. I tell you what it is, Mr. Texas, when a man once gets behind it's deuced hard work for him to pull up again. Nothing so hard as paying for a dead horse." The General rose and paced restlessly up and down the piazza. "If that infernal insurance company would only make some settlement on my claim, if it was only twenty-five cents on the dollar, the ready cash would pull me through!" the General exclaimed, impatiently. "If the president, or secretary, or any other official of that blamed concern would only write me a letter and say that I could have twenty-five or fifty per cent. within six months or so, that would do. I could raise the money on the letter alone, but I'm ashamed to go to a friend and ask him to loan me a thousand dollars or so, knowing that I can't give him any security whatever, and that if anything happens to me, he would never get a cent from my estate."

"But, haven't you heard any thing from the insurance company lately?" Texas asked.

"Not a word since I came back. I saw the agent in Little Rock, and he assured me that the affairs of the company were not near so bad as had been represented, and that

he felt sure a dividend would be declared very soon. Some law case, involving a very heavy sum, had been decided in favor of the company, and the assets had turned out much better than had been expected. He told me he would see that I had a full examination of just how affairs stood from the receiver in charge of the thing as soon as he got back to Memphis; but, as yet, I haven't heard a word. I'm going into town to-night; I had a message from old Fayette, this afternoon, that he would like to see me this evening if I could make it convenient to come. I suppose he wants to talk the matter over and see what I propose to do in the premises."

"Going in right away?"

"Yes, Sam is saddling my horse now," the General replied. "If you have nothing better to do, ride in with me."

"I should really likely to, General," the overseer answered, "but the darkies haven't got back with that load of corn yet, and I think I had better attend to that being put in the storehouse myself."

"Yes, yes, of course," the General said, quickly. "Mr. Texas, it gives me great pleasure, sir, to state to you that I am more than satisfied with your management since you have been on my place. As you honestly said, you were a little green about the duties of an overseer; but you were willing to work and quick to learn, and you get more work out of the negroes than any other man I have ever seen. You have good ideas about improving things, too. If I had had you to advise me to put a few acres in corn last year, as you have done this spring, I should have been a great deal better off. I think your argument is sound. We Southern planters trust too much to cotton, so that when we have a bad year we have nothing to fall back on."

"I'm much obliged for the compliment, General," the overseer said, his face flushing up a little. "I've tried to do my best, and as for the darkies, I merely keep 'em to their work, that's all."

"You have an excellent, systematical way with you; that accounts for it. By the way, Mr. Texas," said the General, very abruptly, "excuse the question, but haven't you served in the army?"

"Why should you think that, General?" asked the overseer, quietly, and with no trace of embarrassment in his manner.

"Well, I fancied I detected a sort of military way with you. I noticed, too, that you have a habit of detailing the hands in squads. I thought, perhaps, that you had served during the late war."

"You're wrong there, General; I had nothing to do with the war. I never lifted a finger on either side," the overseer replied.

"Probably a fancy, but I would have bet almost any thing, sir, that you had served."

Just then Sam's appearance with the General's horse put a stop to the conversation, and mounting, Smith set out for town.

"Those fellows got back with the wagon yet?" Texas asked, after the General had ridden off.

"No, sar," Sam replied.

"What the deuce can keep them?" the overseer exclaimed.

"I dunno, sar," Sam said, doubtfully, scratching his head in deep thought; "I s'pects, dough, Massa Texas, dat dem brack rascalums has done made beasts of demselves wid bad whisky down to de landin'."

"That's very likely; you had better saddle up a horse and ride into town and see what has become of them."

"Yes, sar, I'll done fetch 'em!"

In five minutes Sam was in the saddle and off.

The overseer lit a fresh cigar and listened until the sound of the horse's hoofs ceased in the distance.

"That box bothers me," his thoughts ran on, as he tilted his chair back on its hind legs and puffed a huge volume of smoke into the air. "There's only one person in this world besides myself who could possibly have any motive to get possession of the paper in the box, and that is the man who murdered my father, and whose name is scratched in strokes of blood across the back of the paper. But, how could that person possibly learn of the existence of the box, and the terrible evidences that it contained? That is a mystery. The old negro evidently knew nothing of the contents of the box; and, had not been, apparently, disturbed in its hiding-place since it had been placed there. Can it be that the whole story of the negro, Jupiter, is but fiction, and that the paper he described never had an existence except in his

imagination?" This was a new view of the case, one that had never occurred to the mind of the overseer before. But, after a few moments' reflection he saw that there were strong points against it.

"That can not be the truth," he mused. "What object could the negro gain by coining such a story? The watch and ring were my father's, I am sure; I've seen them a thousand times. Then, too, the moment I got hold of the paper I should have known whether it was my father's handwriting or a forgery. That my father is dead is almost a certainty, for he has never been seen since sixty-three, and, if he is in the world, I surely would have heard from or of him in all these years, for he was well aware of my address at San Antonio. It settles right down to this: first and foremost, the story of the yellow boy, Jupiter, is true; my father was murdered in this neighborhood and before he died Jupiter found him, and my father, with his quill toothpick, wrote the name of his murderer on the back of some legal paper that he happened to have in his possession, and that he used the blood coming from his death-wound for ink; true, too, that the mulatto buried the body and hid the paper in the tobacco-box, and then concealed it in the old cabin, from which it has been stolen by some one. Only one person has any reason to wish to get possession of that paper. Ergo then, if I discover the person who took the paper from the tin-box, I shall, at the same time, discover the man who murdered my father. There, I think I have reduced that down pretty clean."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE HEART OF A PRINCESS

He had hardly finished his train of cogitation and mental comment, when he heard the rustle of a woman's dress, and turning his head, he beheld Missouri advancing along the piazza from the doorway.

The girl had cast a veil over her head, half-concealing the long curls that floated down her back nearly to her waist.

Pretty Missouri had magnificent hair.

The overseer rose from his seat.

"Isn't my father here?" she asked.

"No, Miss," Texas replied; "he went into town, only a little while ago."

"What a beautiful night it is!" Missouri murmured, half to herself, gazing up at the starry heavens above.

"Won't you sit down, Miss?" Texas said, respectfully, placing a chair for the girl as he spoke.

"Thank you," she said, very sweetly, accepting the proffered seat. "Are you learned in star-gazing, Mr. Texas?"

"A little," he responded. He had made a movement as if to retreat from the piazza, but the question restrained him.

"Yes, Miss, a little," he repeated.

"Come and point out the Pleiades to me."

The overseer approached, and as he did so, cast away the cigar which he held in his hand, though it was not a quarter consumed.

The girl noticed the action in surprise.

"You have thrown away your cigar," she said.

"Certainly, when a lady is present."

"On my account?"

"I shall either have to say that it was, or tell you a story," he replied, bluntly.

Missouri looked at the overseer with considerable astonishment manifested in her face at the frank confession, and Texas added: "I don't pretend to be much of a gentleman, but I was brought up not to smoke in the presence of ladies."

This strange-talking young overseer was a complete puzzle to the haughty young Southern girl. At one moment he used as coarse and rough expressions as any rude frontiersman on the border, and the next gave utterance to sentiments that should only come from a gentleman by birth and breeding.

"What a treasure your wife will have!" Missouri said, half in jest, half in earnest.

"Yes, when I get one," the man replied, with a laugh; "you see, Miss, I'm a rough, plain man, and I don't take much stock in women in general."

"So much the better for one in particular," Missouri observed, tartly.

The overseer laughed; he felt that he had been well answered. For a moment or two there was silence; then Missouri spoke, abruptly:

"How do you like our place, Mr. Texas?" Evidently she was forgetting all about the star subject.

"Very well indeed; it's a fine place, Miss. I think that I may reckon myself pretty tolerably lucky to get such a good situation as I have here, with your father."

Missouri's little white teeth compressed the scarlet under lip for a moment. The words of the young man annoyed her. Why did he always contrive to keep the fact that he was her father's overseer before her mind—that, instead of being a friend, he was only a hired man, but a grade or so above the tawny-colored freedmen who tilled her father's fields? Did he do it on purpose? Was he intent upon keeping the fact before her mind that she was General Smith's daughter and he but her father's overseer?

These thoughts coursed rapidly through the young girl's brain as she rested her cheek on her hand, supporting the elbow on the arm of the chair, and gazed out vacantly upon the broad fields of the plantation.

But why should he act in such a manner? Did he think that she was over-forward in speaking to him? It could not be that, for her own heart told her she had hardly treated him with common politeness since he had come on the place, and then, too, her conscience smote her when she reflected that the cool, red-coated stranger had saved her life when a grave beneath the yellow sands of the Arkansas seemed sure to be her fate. True, he had mortally wounded her dignity by his ill-timed remarks, comparing her to a drowned rat at the very moment of salvation, when her heart was full to overflowing with gratitude to the man who had come as a rescuing angel.

No, she would crush back her pride and treat the stranger better in the future. She did not forget that the man had claimed and obtained his reward for the service he had rendered her, but then she could not help acknowledging that a single kiss was but a slight recompense for a life saved.

"I am afraid, Mr. Texas, you must think that I am a very strange girl," she said, with a sudden outburst. "I have never told my father how nobly you saved my life, and I am sure that, since you have been here, I have not really treated you as you deserve to be treated!"

The eager tones of the young and beautiful girl, almost plaintive in their expression, the moist eyes, so large and lustrous, and the earnest face, all combined to enchain the soul of the young man in the silken meshes of passion. For a single instant he wavered; but then before his eyes rose the form of a murdered father calling aloud for vengeance, and with a mighty effort he stilled the leaping blood within his veins, that already had begun to run riot under the influence of love's delicious spell. A moment only, and then he became a man of ice again.

"Well," he said, slowly, the South-western accent coming out strong, "I really think that it would have been a good idea if you had told the old man, for then he might have given me a little more wages."

Just a single instant, Missouri looked into the face of the overseer; then, quick as a flash, she sprung to her feet, an angry light shining in her great, black eyes, and yet her lips were trembling as if she found it hard work to keep back the tear-drops.

The-Man-from-Texas had overshot the mark. He was not aware that the General had told his daughter all the particulars of the first interview with the applicant for the overseership, and that the stranger had refused to accept any wages whatever until his abilities were tested. Knowing these facts, Missouri's mortification at hearing the overseer make such a "mean" confession, can easily be imagined.

"Mr. Texas, I am not a very wise girl, I know, but I am not so great a fool as you seem to take me to be!" she said, in a low and trembling voice; she could not repress her agitation nor conceal it. "You are playing a part to me, sir, and it is unworthy of you. I made a candid confession that I had not treated you right since you have been here, but it is half your fault. Ever since I have known you you have been doing all you can to make me hate you, but I won't—I won't!" she repeated, stamping her foot, pettishly, "and you shan't make me. I was going to ask your pardon just now, and to tell you that in the future I would treat you as a woman ought to treat a man who has saved her life. And I don't care how mean you act, you shan't make me treat you any other way!"

The overseer stood like a marble image, gazing upon the convulsed face and heaving bosom of the young girl—Juno and Niobe strangely commingled. He made no effort to stay her speech nor to answer.

"Don't you understand, sir, I am a Southern girl?" she exclaimed with a little, imperious stamp of the foot; "it's hard for me to confess that I have been in the wrong, but I have done it. I know that you have been making a fool of me, and I have acted like a great goose, but that's over now, so you needn't play your part any more. You are a gentleman even if you are an overseer, and I know it; there now!"

And then Missouri swept proudly into the house with the air of an Eastern queen, but, truth compels the statement, that she immediately went up to her room, and flinging herself on her bed, began to cry like a child.

"Smith isn't a very royal name, but that girl has got the heart of a princess in her body," the overseer said.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BLACK RIDERS.

A HORSEMAN came galloping up the road, and Texas could hear the rumble of a heavy wagon in the distance.

The rider was Sam.

"You found 'em, eh?" Texas asked, descending to the ground from the piazza.

"Yes, sar; dat Joe is jes' as drunk as a b'iled owl, sar, and de odder one ain't much better. Dem's two big scally-waglums, Massa Texas," Sam replied.

"Ride back and have them go direct to the store-house. I'll cut across the plantation."

"Yes, sar." Then Sam rode off to intercept the wagon, while Texas hastened to the store-house. It was a square building built out of hewn logs about a couple of hundred feet back of the stable.

The door was fastened by an immense padlock which the overseer unlocked and then entered the building. Lighting a candle, he sat down to await the coming of the wagon.

The store-house was used for the more bulky supplies, such as bags of corn and oats, and bales of hay, straw, etc.

In about five minutes the wagon arrived. As Sam had said, the two blacks in charge of it seemed considerably the worse for liquor; but as they were still able to work, Texas told Sam he needn't wait, and proceeded to set the two hands to unload the wagon and stow away the bags of corn in the house, while Sam proceeded to the stable.

It did not take long to unload the wagon, and the moment the work was finished, the overseer started the blacks off to put the mules up, while he lingered for a moment in the store-house to make a memorandum of how many bags had been brought by the wagon.

Texas sat down on a bale of hay, and proceeded to check the account.

Hardly had his pencil made the first mark when the door was thrown suddenly open, and four figures, wrapped in black cloaks, with their faces hidden by black masks, through which shone gleaming eyes, entered the store-house, closing the door behind them. Each one of the masked men carried a revolver, cocked and loaded; and the last one of the four, a giant in size, carried a little coil of rope on his arm, and the end that swung from his hand was adjusted in a hangman's noose.

The-Man-from-Texas looked up in unaffected astonishment at this sudden irruption of somber and threatening figures.

But the overseer never rose from his seat upon the bale of hay; he still held the note-book upon his knee, and the pencil was still raised to make the stroke; his nerves were surely of iron.

"Four on 'em," he muttered, between his teeth, "and I don't believe it's a very good night for Ku Kluxes, either."

Although this was the first time that Texas had ever been brought face to face with any of the night marauders who assumed the disguise of black cloaks and masks, he guessed at once who his visitors were.

The masked ruffians, who, under the name of Ku Klux, have committed such terrible outrages in the South, had quite a playful origin. At first reckless young men, who were eager for a little fun, assumed horrible disguises, and rode in squads at night for the purposes of frightening simple-minded negroes; and by taking advantage of that terror, shut them within doors at night and so keep them from nocturnal plundering excursions upon the property of the white planters.

As the night-riders were always completely disguised, the rogues and thieves soon adopted the cloaks and masks to cover their purposes; then the politicians took it up—particularly when it was necessary to get rid of some office-holder who couldn't be frightened away by words. And at the time of which we write—1868—the Ku Klux bands were a terror and a disgrace to various parts of the South, and were used more for the purpose of covering traces of personal quarrel, and for the satisfaction of private vengeance than any thing else, though earnestly preached against by the leading men of both the political parties. The victims, as a general rule, were strangers, or upholders of the dominant party. The Government at this time had not crushed out Ku Kluxism with the iron heel of military power.

"Stranger, listen!" said the masked man in the advance, in a hoarse voice, evidently assumed.

"Jes' hold on a minute, fellow-citizens, till I get through with this ciphering, and I will attend to your cases," the overseer replied, cool as an icicle, and apparently not in the least disturbed by the presence of his strange visitors. Then he went on with his calculation.

"Sixteen bags of corn from Scott and Company, received April 16th, correct!" Then he closed his book and returned it and the pencil to his pocket.

The masked men looked at each other in some little astonishment. The coolness of the man puzzled them. It was evident he was not at all frightened.

"Now, my brethren, spit it out; what is it? I'm your man," said Texas.

"The clock has struck twelve—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed the overseer, quickly, interrupting the chief of the Ku Klux; "that clock is wrong; it isn't ten yet."

"Do not dare to trifle with us!" cried the masked man, sternly. "We are the Ku Klux Klan—your doom is fixed—you die at twelve."

"Recorded!" groaned the rest of the masked men, in solemn chorus.

"Played out!" ejaculated the overseer, contemptuously. "You can't skeer me worth a cent! Take off your lion-skins; your ears betray that you are only a lot of jackasses!"

The masked men got angry at this, and made a step toward the overseer, but he faced them with an undaunted look and never moved.

"Rash man! Why tempt our vengeance by empty boasts?" cried the chief of the four. "We, the dreaded Ku Klux Klan, the riders of the night, whom, from empty skulls, drink of the warm and living blood—"

"Oh, go to thunder!" cried Texas, rising in contempt. "See here, now; this has gone jest about far enough. You may be able to play this on the niggers, but you can't on me. I'll give you just five minutes to get out of this shanty, or I'll just go in and clean you out the whole lot of you, though I haven't got a weapon. I can stand a joke as well as most men, but this is a little too much for good nature."

The Ku Kluxers understood at once the mistake that the overseer was laboring under. He had taken the whole affair to be a practical joke.

"Ozark, show yourself," commanded the chief; "convince the stranger that we are in dead earnest."

The second one of the masked men removed the covering from his face and revealed the features of the outlaw.

Texas was astonished. He knew Ozark by reputation, and recognized him at once from the description given of him.

"I'm Yell Ozark, I am," growled the outlaw; "mebbe you've heard of me!"

"This is no joke; we mean business every time," cried the Ku Klux leader, sternly. "We give you twenty-four hours' warning to leave this place—this county. If you are found within the limits of Franklin after that time, may the Lord have mercy on your soul."

"Why do you order me away?" Texas demanded, considerably mystified by these strange proceedings.

"That is our business," returned the masked man, sternly.

"I haven't trod on anybody's toes since I've been here that I'm aware of," Texas expostulated.

"Seek not to question, but obey," said the masked man.

"I'll see you in the bottomless pit first!" replied the overseer, with uncommon energy.

The masked men started in surprise.

"You refuse to go?" cried the Ku Klux leader, in a tone of menace.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

UNFORTUNATE MISS BUTTERFLY.

MISSOURI extended upon her bed with her face buried in the pillow, sobbing as if her heart would break, heard the sound of Sam's horse's hoofs as he galloped up and then rode away again; then she heard the overseer descend the creaking steps and the low rumble of the wagon as it passed by the house on its way to the store-room.

It was probably a quarter of an hour, at least, before Missouri recovered her composure. Then she rose from the bed, lighted a candle and sat down by the window to meditate.

Long and thoughtfully she reflected upon what had passed between her and the overseer.

"I suppose that I acted like a silly child, and that he won't have the best opinion in the world of me," she murmured; "but I couldn't help it. I knew that he was making believe, and I couldn't have helped telling him I knew it, if I had died for it."

Then she looked out of the window over the fields toward the store-house, as if she expected that her eyes would pierce alike the gloom of the night and the wall of the log-cabin, and so reveal to her sight the form of the overseer.

Five or ten minutes she had sat in deep meditation by the window, when she heard a low scratching on the door. That was Butterfly's knock, and a moment after the door opened and the young negro girl came in, looking frightened half to death.

"What's the matter, Butterfly? Your eyes are as big as saucers."

"Oh, bress de Lord, missy, dey's come!" exclaimed the girl, sinking on her knees in an agony of terror.

Missouri rose from her seat in wonder. She saw at once that something very unusual must have occurred to produce such a state of terror, for Butterfly was quite courageous by nature.

"What is the matter, Butterfly? Can't you tell me—what has come?"

"Oh! we's all gwine to be killed!" and then the girl commenced to rock herself to and fro and to howl dismally.

"Stop your crying at once, Butterfly!" exclaimed Missouri, firmly but kindly. "Tell me what you have seen. Is it something on the stairs or in your room?"

"Oh, no, missy," the girl sobbed. "Oh, 'fore de Lord, save us poor sinners! Dey's out dar, missy," and then the girl pointed through the open window toward the stables and store-house.

Missouri's heart gave a great leap and for a moment she felt a choking sensation in her throat.

She darted at the girl and seizing her by the shoulder, raised her bodily from the floor.

"Tell me instantly what you have seen and where!" she exclaimed, excitedly, and in her nervous agitation, she gave the unfortunate Butterfly a good shaking which had the effect of bringing her partially to her senses.

"Dey's all out dere by de store-house an' in de store-house wid Massa Texas. I was comin' from aunt Dinah's house an' I see'd 'em wid my own two lookin' eyes!" the girl howled.

"Saw who?" exclaimed Missouri, almost in despair of ever getting any information from the terrified girl.

"Dem debils wid black 'tings, dat rides nights for to eat poor niggers!" cried Butterfly.

"The Ku Klux!"

Missouri started back in horror, weak as a child, and Butterfly went down on the floor, all in a heap, with a most dismal howl.

The girl was well aware of the terrible nature of the generality of the visits of the masked men, and her heart trembled for the overseer.

"Was any one else there?" she demanded, with a great effort stilling her agitation.

"No, missy; dere was a hundred of dem went into de nouse arter Massa Texas, an' one on dem stayed outside," the negress said, between her howls of terror.

Missouri understood at once that this statement was a little exaggerated.

The girl pressed her hand upon her heart as though by that act she would calm its tumultuous throbbings.

"Oh, Heaven, give me strength in this my hour of need!" she murmured. Wildly the thoughts flashed through her brain; desperately she essayed to think of some plan to rescue the overseer from the terrible danger which threatened him.

Her first impulse was to send for the field-hands to go to the assistance of Texas, but instantly rejected the idea, as

she thought of the terror these midnight riders inspired among the superstitious blacks.

Then she thought of Sam; she knew that he had served in the Union army, and having smelt powder on the field of battle, would not be so apt to give way to the Ku Klux fear.

Then to Missouri's mind came the thought that, while superintending the arranging of the overseer's room that morning, she had seen his revolvers lying in the bureau drawer.

"Oh, Heaven!" she murmured; "he is unarmed and in their hands!" Then a sudden idea came into her head. "With the revolvers, Sam and I might be able to frighten them off."

Missouri proceeded at once to the overseer's room. As she had expected, the two revolvers were in the drawer. Securing them, she perceived that every chamber was loaded.

Then, followed by Butterfly, who was trembling in every limb with terror, and therefore kept close to the heels of her mistress, Missouri went at once to the stable.

As usual, Sam had a choice collection of familiar spirits with him.

Missouri called him out and briefly explained the situation to him.

Sam's military ardor was inflamed in a minute.

"By golly, I ain't afeard of dem rascals!" he exclaimed. "I fit 'em when I was in de army, an' dey can't skeer me 'kase dey's got dar faces kivered up. I've got my musket inside an' dar's five or six good boys in dar fur to help us; dey kin yell, if dey can't fight. I jes' tell 'em dat dere's some chicken-thieves down round de store-house, an' I won't say nuffin' 'bout dem brack riders, 'kase dat will skeer 'em. You see, missy, dey ain't fit fur Uncle Sam, like I have."

Then Sam went inside, got his musket and assembled his followers. Five minutes after the "army" was on its way to rescue the overseer.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN EASY VICTORY.

"REFUSE to go?" exclaimed Texas, repeating the words of the masked man; "of course I refuse! I don't acknowledge your right to order me away. What have I done to you or to any of the people of this county? You ought to consider me a good Southern-rights man, for I have whaled a sarcy nigger like thunder since I've been here."

A hoarse growl of rage came from the gigantic figure in black, who held the rope, at this announcement.

"The Ku Klux Klan do not give their reasons," said the leader of the band, sternly. "Enough that you have been marked for death by the mystic brotherhood of the South, unless you instantly quit this place. The Grand Cyclops has spoken; the single eye is upon you and you must obey."

"Brotherhood of the South!" exclaimed the overseer, in contempt; "that's a lie! You're a set of scallywags, the whole lot of you; a band of mean, cowardly cut-throats that take advantage of the darkness and a disguise to satisfy private and personal grudges. No true man, North or South, will hide his face behind a mask and stab his enemy without giving him a chance for his life. You're a cowardly set of miserable, sneaking cowards! Fire and be hanged to you! You've got arms and are four to one, but if you don't kill me first fire, I'll strangle one or two of you before I get through."

Weaponless and alone, but with every muscle in his frame swelling with indignation, The-Man-from-Texas defied the Ku Klux band. The cowardly assault had wrought him to such a pitch of rage that death had no terrors for him.

At this critical period, when the revolvers of the masked ruffians were about to lodge their leaden contents into the body of the reckless overseer, clear and shrill a woman's voice sounded on the air.

"Here they are, father, in the store-house!"

Then followed the hoarse voice of the violent Sam.

"Furst company forward by de flank; second battallion take 'em in de rear! Ready—fire!"

Then came a scattering volley of shots, followed by a yell that rung in the ears of the masked men like the knell of impending doom.

The unceremonious way in which the Ku Klux band left that store-house and got upon their horses and flew, fully proved that retreating was their "best holt"—to use the "Westernism."

The raising of the siege was performed so quickly that even the overseer was taken by surprise.

Another yell, more powerful than the first, came from the lips of Sam and his "army" as they beheld the sudden flight of the black riders.

And as for the members of the Ku Klux band, they were firmly convinced that old General Smith had armed all the negroes on the plantation and had planned a deliberate attack for the purpose of capturing the whole party.

"You infernal fools!" growled the leader of the band—who was no other than Will Fayette—enraged that he had yielded to sudden fear and allowed himself to be carried away by the headlong rush of the rest; "why didn't you stand? It was only Smith and the negroes, and they won't fight."

"They'll fight like blue blazes, sometimes," exclaimed Ozark, in reply; "don't you remember the fight at Jenkin's Ferry, or the battle of the Saline, as the Yanks call it? The nigs fought like devils thar."

"Gentlemen, I protest against this Ku Klux business!" exclaimed another one of the riders, in a trembling voice. "We might have been all killed by these ignorant blacks!" The speaker was Job Foxcroft.

And as the party rode on, they indulged in mutual recrimination as to who had been the first to run, and finally all united in blaming the sentinel for allowing himself to be surprised; and that worthy—one of the vagabonds of the "landing," who had been seduced into the affair by the gift of a bottle of whisky—protested that the "hull darned army" had crept up under the shelter of a worm fence, and that the "furst thing" he knew of the attack was when they opened fire.

One thing was certain, though; the Ku Klux expedition was chiefly distinguished by its complete failure.

After the abrupt and ignominious flight of the masked men, the rescuing army advanced to the store-house, at the door of which the overseer appeared.

"We's done beat 'em!" Sam exclaimed, in triumph, waving his musket wildly in the air. "By golly, how dey run! You couldn't see de hosses, fur de dust dey raised!"

Missouri had only waited to catch sight of the overseer, and to assure herself that he was unharmed; then had taken advantage of the darkness to return to the house.

But Sam related to the overseer the part that the girl had in his rescue, and Texas was fully conscious that to her he probably owed his life.

The overseer locked up the store-room and returned to the house, while the blacks went to their quarters.

About half-past ten General Smith got home, and was very much astonished at hearing of the Ku Klux's visit and warning, and was utterly unable to assign a reason for their hostility to the overseer.

Texas, though, had reflected over the matter, and an idea had come to him. If, in some mysterious way, the object of his visit to Smithville had become known to the man who had killed his father, that person would have a very excellent reason to wish to force him to leave. The mysterious warning, coupled with the strange disappearance of the contents of the tin box, all tended to convince him that the assassin was still in the village, and from his being able to control the masked men, was evidently a man of some note.

Texas felt certain of two things.

The man who had started the Ku Klux band after him, and the man who had stolen the paper left by his slain father, was one and the same, and that man was the one that he was in search of.

The General and Texas had resumed their former seats on the piazza to talk the Ku Klux attack over, and, after they had duly discussed that topic, the General abruptly turned the conversation to his visit to old Fayette, the banker.

"What do you suppose he said, Mr. Texas, when I asked him if it was possible for him to extend the mortgage, after telling him frankly just how I stood?"

"I haven't the least idea, sir."

"Well, he talked—as men generally do when asked for a favor of that kind—of how scarce money was, and how he had depended upon the sum due from me to meet certain things with, and that he didn't really see how he was going to get on without it, but—now mind, Mr. Texas, this was put in the most gentlemanly manner, for Fayette is a high-toned gentleman, every inch of him, and, of course, he would not say a single word to wound me in any way—he informed me in the most delicate style, so that I could not possibly take umbrage, that his son had formed a sincere attachment for my daughter, and that, if the young people could manage to form an alliance, he should feel especially

honored, and would present his daughter-in-law with a little document, worth about four thousand dollars. You will understand, Mr. Texas, this was said with extreme regard to my feelings. No bargain and sale about it. As a man of business, obliged to meet certain payments at certain times, he must enforce the agreement entered into between us; but as a Southern gentleman and a neighbor, yielding to his sympathies, and wishing to see his son settled in life, he was willing to make any pecuniary sacrifice in his power."

A grave look settled upon the face of the overseer as he listened to the recital.

"A fair offer it seems to me," he said, slowly.

"Yes, it depends upon Missouri now. I shall see her tomorrow. Good-night."

And the two retired.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

'TILDA FORSYTH.

MATILDA FORSYTH, or 'Tilda, as she was more generally termed, was not what might be called a handsome girl. She was tall in stature, lean in flesh, with coarse brown hair, green-gray eyes, and a sallow complexion.

Not a very striking picture did she present, as she stood in the center of the road, a hundred feet or so from the log-cabin—her home—with the last rays of the afternoon sun shining down upon her uncovered head, arrayed in a faded calico gown, and anxiously looking up and down in search of the one cow that the Forsyth family claimed as its own.

But "Brindle" was nowhere to be seen, and did not deign to come to the repeated calls made by the girl.

"Brindle—you, Brindle, whar air you?"

Just as she was meditating whether she should go up or down the narrow road, in search of the dilatory source of supply for the evening meal, she heard a crashing noise coming from the "bush" on the right hand of the road, about a hundred yards from her, as if some heavy body was forcing its way through the bramble and undergrowth.

Never doubting for an instant that it was the missing beast, 'Tilda renewed her enticing cry:

"Oh, Brindle! you, Brindle!"

Then out into the road came, not the cow, Brindle, but the outlaw, Yell Ozark, armed to the teeth, as usual, and bearing the trusty shot-gun in his hand.

"Is you lookin' fur your cow, 'Tilda?" he asked.

"Yes," the girl answered, coldly.

"I see'd the beast an hour or so ago down by the cane-brake," he said. "She'll start fur home jes' as soon as the sun's down. I say, 'Tilda, I'll be dog-goned if you ain't lookin' as handsome as a three-year old colt jes' turned out into the prairie. Feelin' pooty well?"

"Yes," replied the girl, sharply, latent hostility in her voice and manner.

"See hyer!" exclaimed the outlaw, after studying the matter over in his mind for a moment. "I reckon that you ain't right glad fur to see me."

"Well, I reckon I ain't," replied the girl, defiantly.

Ozark was a little staggered by this abrupt declaration.

"What's the matter with ye, 'Tilda?" he asked, coaxingly.

"What fuss hev you got with me? Look a-hyer, gal, I's allers been a friend of yours."

"Small thanks to you," retorted 'Tilda, disdainfully; "you better take your friendship whar somebody wants it; this chile don't."

"Now, see hyer, 'Tilda; this is rough, this is, goin' back on a friend in this hyer way," said Ozark, appealingly. "What's the fuss? I ain't got any thing ag'in' you."

"I don't want you 'round me at all!" the girl exclaimed, sharply. "I tole you so the last time I saw you; I want you to keep away an' let me alone."

"'Tilda, I jes' thinks a heap of you," the outlaw replied, impressively. "I think a heap sight more of you, 'Tilda, than I do of any other gal that treads in shoe-leather in this hyer hull State of Arkansas!"

"Yes, and much good it will do you!" the girl exclaimed, with an expression of scorn upon her face that made even the thick-skinned outlaw wince.

Ozark lost his temper; he ground his teeth together for a moment, and the left hand gripped the lock of the shot-gun in a very significant manner.

"See hyer, now; you'll git hurt, the fust thing you know, ef you talk so durned sarcy," he cried, threateningly. "I ain't used to havin' people sarce me, an' I don't stand much. You had better keep a civil tongue in your head."

"I sh'an't for you!" retorted the girl, not in the least alarmed. "I ain't afeard of you ef the hull State is. Ef you don't like my tongue, you jes' cl'ar back into the bush ag'in. Nobody axed you fur to come hyer. An' ef yer come thinkin' fur to court me, I reckon the quicker you quit the better. I wouldn't hev nuffin to do with any sich ornery little yaller pup as you air, ef you owned every foot of sile from hyer cl'ar to Fort Smith!"

Ozark was thunderstruck; he had never been talked to in this fashion in all his life. If the speaker had been a man, he would have shed his heart's blood there and then, and he felt half-inclined to do so as it was, but with an effort he restrained his angry passion.

"Why, 'Tilda, you're a reg'lar wild-cat!" he said, with a forced laugh; he was trying to treat the affair as a joke. "Your sister, now, was a reg'lar lamb."

"And you killed her with your cruelty, you durned coward!" the girl exclaimed, fiercely, her anger so intense that she hardly knew what she was saying. "Oh, you needn't finger the lock of your shot-gun; I ain't skeered of ye. It's lucky for you, Yell Ozark, that you didn't git me instead of my sister, fur the furst time you laid the weight of a finger on me, I would have waited till you got asleep, an' I'd shot off yer hull head wid yer own gun!"

Ozark ground his teeth together and made a motion as if to cock the gun, but the girl never flinched.

"I ain't afeard of you!" she repeated; "you don't dar' to kill me. I ain't a nigger, nor a radical ossifer; you tech me, and you'll have every decent white man in the county arter yer, an' they'll ketch ye an' string ye up like a dog, as you ought to be, you mean, poor white trash!"

This was too much; Ozark felt that he had to leave or else do the girl a mischief, and that was not prudent.

"I've a good mind to smack you right over!" he cried, raising his hand, threateningly, whereupon the girl, never shrinking from the contest, put herself in a position, not only to guard against but to return the blow.

Then it suddenly occurred to Ozark that, unless he used his weapons, in an affair of fisticuffs the gaunt, strong-limbed girl, who o'ertopped him three inches at least, would, in all probability, be more than a match for him, and that it might end in his getting thrashed by a woman.

With a violent effort the outlaw swallowed his passion, and shaking his fist at the girl, exclaimed:

"I'll git even with you, yit!" and then he plunged into the bush by the road-side from which he had come.

Then the girl went down toward the cane-brake after the cow, but met Brindle proceeding slowly homeward before she had got half-way.

A little after sundown Pete called in. 'Tilda related to him her encounter with the outlaw, and warned him to look out for himself, for Ozark would probably attempt to shoot him if he discovered his visits to the house.

After supper the lovers—for that was the relation between Pete and 'Tilda—went and sat on a log outside the cabin. Small trace of the wild-cat in the girl, through all that long spring evening, as she confidingly leaned her head on her lover's shoulder.

The moon came up bright at ten, and about eleven Pete rose to take his departure. He gave 'Tilda a hearty smack on the lips, bid her good-night, and took three steps in the moonlight toward the road, when—bang! came the report of a shot-gun from the bush, a hundred feet or so from him, and with a terrible moan the German lad went down in the yellow dust—dead, a half-dozen buck-shot in his brain.

CHAPTER XL.

THAT DOUBLE-BARRELED GUN.

THE murder of Pete created quite a little ripple of excitement in Smithville and the neighborhood.

The quiet German lad was generally liked, and as there was no possible reason why any one should kill him, as he had never quarreled with a single soul since he had come to Smithville, men began to look askance at each other, and mutter that it was about time that this sort of thing was put down.

There was very little doubt as to the man who had lain in wait for Pete, although no one had seen who fired the shot; the manner of the deed and the weapon used sufficiently indicated the outlaw, Yell Ozark.

Probably for the first time since sixty-one, there was an almost universal expression of pleasure as a United States

lieutenant and ten boys in blue rode into Smithville, with orders to hunt down the outlaw.

Some three days after the murder of Pete, a negro came to the lieutenant and informed him that Ozark had taken refuge at the house of a distant relative of his, about two miles beyond the county seat on the East road. This negro's brother had been killed by the outlaw for daring to vote at a town election, and naturally the black thirsted for revenge.

The soldiers and the negro set out.

They arrived at the county seat, passed through it—much to the wonder of the inhabitants—and rode down the East road, then, dashing up to the log-cabin, surrounded it in a most masterly manner. But the disgust of the lieutenant in command was intense when he discovered that the outlaw was not in the cabin.

The woman whom the soldiers found in the shanty made no secret of the fact that the outlaw had been there, but said he had gone away on a mule.

Disappointed, the lieutenant resumed his saddle and set out at the head of his men to return to the county seat, as he fully realized that there was little use of hunting after the ruffian, who had, in all probability, received a warning of their coming and had sought refuge in the swamp.

The soldiers rode slowly along the road on their homeward way, and the negro beguiled the tediousness of the journey by relating some of the outlaw's desperate and bloody deeds.

Then the negro happened to turn his head and glance behind him, and a yell of terror came from his lips.

"Oh, Lord! dar he is now!"

Bang! The double-barrel spoke, and a load of buck-shot tore through the arm of the rearmost soldier.

Mounted on his gray mule, the outlaw—learning that the troops had been at the cabin after him—had pursued them to give battle.

Bang! went the other barrel.

A horse got it this time, the charge falling short.

The soldiers had just given one glance at the little, sallow man, mounted on the mule, and then had dug their spurs into their horses' flanks and fled in wild confusion without waiting to return a shot. Twelve men—ten of them regular soldiers—"stampeded" by one!

The soldiers rode into the county seat and took possession of the court-house, intending to use that as a base of operations.

In their flight they had completely run away from the outlaw; but, judge of their surprise, when a negro came in with the intelligence that Ozark had followed them into town, and was now domiciled at the saloon down the street, enjoying a bottle of whisky and a box of sardines, and waiting for the soldiers to attack him.

Just about this time it occurred to the lieutenant in command of the party that to beat the outlaw in a horse-race was not exactly what he had been sent to do; and nettled at the reckless bravado of the outlaw, also feeling a little ashamed of his own conduct so far in the affair, the able and intelligent officer—history has not preserved his name—mounted his men to attack Ozark, who was intrenched in a saloon upon the ground floor, watching through the window and the glass door for the approach of the attacking force.

The soldiers came up first at a smart trot, then slackened little by little into a walk.

The moment they came within range, the outlaw coolly and deliberately leveled the shot-gun and put a charge of buck-shot into the breast of the sergeant on the right, killing him instantly; the soldier next to the sergeant got the second barrel in the right shoulder, putting him completely out of fighting trim.

The lieutenant gave the word to fire, and the soldiers—nervous at the bloody effect of the outlaw's fire—poured an irregular and scattering volley into the shanty, and then, urged on by their officer, who was eager to retrieve his blunders, dashed toward the saloon.

Ozark, who had received a ball in the fleshy part of his left arm, but had sustained no other damage from the soldiers' fire, seized his revolvers and poured six shots, one after the other, as fast as he could fire, into the charging troops.

One of the foremost men was killed outright, two more were slightly wounded, and the attacking column suddenly broke, seized by a panic, wheeled their horses round and ingloriously fled back to their former quarters in the court-house, leaving their dead and wounded comrades on the field of battle, and the victory with the outlaw.

Ozark called upon one of the citizens—who had ventured out, seeing that the affray for the present was over—to bind up his arm; then reloaded his weapons, called for more

whisky and another box of sardines, and waited for the next move on the part of the Federals.

Twenty, thirty minutes passed and no soldiers appeared. Ozark got impatient. He learned from one of the citizens that the troops were still in the court-house; so he sat down, wrote a note, and dispatched it by a negro to the lieutenant in command of the Federal squad.

That gentleman was sorely cut up by his defeat; he had lost five men out of ten, three killed and two wounded, and what to do he knew not. If he had not succeeded in storming the enemy's position with ten men, how could he hope for a successful issue now that he had only five?

While deliberating over this grave question, the outlaw's messenger arrived and delivered his note. The lieutenant was somewhat astonished.

The note was addressed:

"To the Commander-in-chief of the United States forces holding the court-house of Franklin."

The lieutenant opened it; the note was extremely brief and very much to the point; it read as follows:

"SIR:—I hereby demand the unconditional surrender of yourself and force within ten minutes, or I propose to move immediately upon your works.

(Signed)

YELL OZARK,

Major-General C. S. A.,

Commanding Army of Franklin."

It was a grim and ghastly joke.

The Federal soldiers did not wait for the ten minutes to expire. Inside of five they were in the saddle and in full retreat for Smithville, leaving the outlaw master of the field!*

CHAPTER XLI.

A BOLD STEP.

WHEN Texas went in to breakfast, on the morning after the Ku Klux attack, he noticed that Missouri seemed strangely reserved. It was evident that the young girl had something on her mind. The overseer guessed at once that the General had acquainted her with the proposition that old Fayette, the banker, had made, and he looked at Missouri's face with a great deal of curiosity, as if he expected to read there the answer that she would give.

If Missouri's face was any indication of her thoughts regarding the matter, she was not particularly pleased with the idea, and the overseer felt in quite high spirits as he noticed how grave was the expression upon the features of the girl.

As for the lady, she had stolen a quiet glance at the overseer, after he had got fairly at work upon the eatables before him, and the look of contentment which appeared upon his face did not seem to please her in the least.

It was not a very lively group, at the breakfast-table, that morning. Missouri was sad, the overseer quiet, and the General strangely absent-minded.

The meal was over at last, much to the relief of both father and daughter, but Texas never seemed to notice the abstraction of the others.

The General and the overseer departed at once to set the hands to work. Smith did not mention the subject of his daughter's marriage with young Fayette, and the overseer on his part refrained from questioning.

The hour of twelve came, and the two returned to the house for dinner.

Missouri announced that it would not be ready for half an hour, at which the General remarked that it would give him time to write a letter to Memphis in relation to the insurance matter; so he went into the house, leaving Texas standing on the steps of the piazza, and Missouri just in the doorway.

Missouri hesitated irresolutely in the doorway for a moment, and then, as if seeming to make up her mind suddenly, stepped out on the piazza, and leaning on the railing, addressed the man, three steps below:

"Mr. Texas, will you give me a little advice?" she asked, abruptly, her voice low but firm.

The overseer was considerably astonished at this question. For about the first time since Missouri had known him he betrayed traces of embarrassment.

"Of course, Miss, I shall be most happy to do so, if I can," he replied, earnestly.

"You are the only one that I can ask, and I am about to speak to you as if you were my brother."

*The above is no romance, gentle reader, but history. Any officer of the 19th infantry, U. S. A.—the regiment stationed in Arkansas in sixty-eight and nine—Major Witherell, of Eastport, Maine, Lieutenant Wenie, of Wilmington, Delaware, or Major Smith, of Chicago, can testify that the Arkansas Outlaw really performed the deeds I have credited to him.

"And I'll try, Miss, to give you a brother's advice!" Texas exclaimed, abruptly, and he advanced one step up nearer to the girl.

The color in Missouri's face heightened just a little at the movement, but she stuck resolutely to her position.

"I should perhaps not have dared to have spoken to you but that I know father has told you all about it. I overheard the conversation between you and father last night on the piazza. I could not help hearing it, for my room is right overhead, and I was sitting at the window when he began, and father always speaks so loud. I suppose he got into that habit in the army. Now, Mr. Texas, I haven't any one else to advise me, so I ask you. Father said to do just as I liked; he would not advise me either one way or the other. I must make my own choice."

"Well, Miss, I really don't know as I am quite the proper sort of person to advise you in such a matter as this," he answered, thoughtfully. "Mr. Fayette I have never met, personally, but from what I have heard of him I should judge that he'd make a pretty good match for almost any young lady. I've heard it said that he is one of the rising men of the State, and as he has both ability and money to back it, there's no telling how high he may climb before he gets through."

A look of impatience mingled with vexation passed swiftly across the maiden's face.

"You think that it is a good match?" she asked, in quite a sorrowful tone.

"Yes, Miss, it's my honest opinion that it is."

"Then it doesn't make any difference whether I care any thing about him or not?" demanded the girl, imperiously, her eyes flashing and her lips trembling. "I must sell myself to him because he has money and I am poor—worse than poor—a beggar, by father's account. I *must* marry a man that I know I don't love."

"You didn't say any thing about that," the overseer retorted, bluntly. "You asked me if I thought that it was a good match."

"And you do not think I ought to marry him unless I love him?" the girl said, slowly.

"Of course I don't!" Texas replied, promptly; "a marriage without love is but an earthly contract, and can never receive Heaven's sanction."

The girl opened her eyes widely at this speech. She had never heard the overseer express himself in such a manner before.

"I suppose that father will have to give up the plantation, though," she said, reflectively, "and then you will lose your situation." And, as she spoke, she shot a quick glance under her long, dark eyelashes at the face before her.

"I reckon that if the General makes up his mind to emigrate, he'll give me a chance to go along with him, Miss," the overseer said, cheerfully. "I sha'n't quarrel about the wages, and with a fresh start on new ground, 'tis ten to one that your father will be able to hold his own with the world. I wish I had a few thousand dollars!"

"What would you do with the money?" she asked, slowly.

"Speculate on it," he replied, tersely.

"Speculate—how?" she asked.

"Lend it to your father—without conditions, and depend upon gratitude to give me the treasure which money should not buy."

Missouri's face grew red as fire; then, with a great effort, she looked the overseer full in the face; the full, black eyes were now soft and lustrous in their light.

"I am glad you haven't got a thousand dollars," she said, slowly, "even though it might save the plantation; but—"

"But what?" asked Texas, quite eagerly, taking her little right hand between his own brown paws as he spoke.

"I do not think I could like the man who only lends my father money half as well as the one who saved my life," the girl replied, with a charming smile.

"Dinner, Missy!" exclaimed Butterfly, from the house-door, interrupting the conversation.

But, enough had been said; eyes had spoken if lips had not, and two very happy people sat down to dinner under General Smith's roof, that day.

What was money weighed 'gainst love in a young girl's mind?

CHAPTER XLII.

MANY THINGS.

IN the cool of the evening Foxcroft and Fayette were walking along carelessly down by the levee of Smithville, earnestly engaged in conversation. Yell Ozark and his latest exploits formed the topic of conversation between the two. Foxcroft was seriously uneasy; he trembled lest the outlaw should be captured and reveal the influential friends who had hitherto aided him.

Fayette laughed at the idea.

"Don't worry about that!" he exclaimed. "Whatever Ozark's faults may be, treachery is not one of them. Not to save his neck from the rope would he betray us."

"Men will do a great many things when in a tight place," Foxcroft replied, dubiously. A coward at heart himself, he judged all the rest of mankind by his standard.

"There is not the slightest danger. The chances, too, are a hundred to one that Ozark will not be taken alive. And now, Foxcroft, I want you to do me a favor," Fayette said.

"Certainly; what is it?" and the fat storekeeper looked just a little bit astonished.

"You remember that Ozark and myself went in search of a box that was hidden in an old cabin, by the edge of the swamp?"

"Yes; do you know that I forgot all about it?" Foxcroft exclaimed. "How did you make out?"

"We found the box without any trouble, but it only contained a few scraps of paper."

"Oh, I see; the overseer got there before you and secured whatever the box contained."

"No, you are wrong there," Fayette rejoined, "for Ozark and myself hid in the swamp until the morning and saw the overseer and the old negro come to the cabin."

"Who do you suppose got at the box?" demanded Foxcroft, evidently astonished.

"I think that the old negro knows something about it," Fayette replied, thoughtfully. "The box only contained a paper which alone concerned the overseer, Ozark and myself. In fact, that statement in part is only guesswork, and it may not concern Ozark and myself at all. Now, I wish that you would call upon old Uncle Snow and see if you can either coax or frighten the old darky into telling whether he did tamper with the box or not."

"I can find out easily enough," Foxcroft said, confidently. "I can pretend that I met this Jupiter who left the box and that he told me all about it. Let us turn back and I'll go up to the shanty at once."

The two turned and commenced to retrace their steps.

"By the way, how does the Smith affair come on?" Foxcroft asked.

"The young lady declines, and I shall have to put old Smith through a course of sprouts," Fayette answered, moodily. "There's a chance for you to speculate if you want to buy a plantation cheap. I shall bring it under the hammer as soon as the law will let me."

"I'll think about it."

As the two passed through the main street of the village the overseer rode by them.

Texas evidently had just come from the plantation. As he rode down the street, he met Winnie and Adair coming up.

All three halted and exchanged salutations; then Gol Adair threw off a little to one side, leaving the two friends together.

"Where are you bound?" Winnie asked.

"Running a fox to earth," the overseer replied, carelessly.

"Well, I'm going to do a little in that line myself," the soldier said, with a laugh; "but, what fox are you after?"

"Do you remember what I told you about my father?"

"Yes; he was killed in this neighborhood, and you came after a paper on which he had written the name of his murderer."

"Exactly; well, I found that the paper was concealed in a tin tobacco-box, and the box hidden in an old shanty. I went to the place, got the box, and on opening it found that it only contained the scraps of a letter."

"Some one had been there before you?"

"Yes," Texas replied, "and had taken away what I sought, and left other scraps of paper, evidently thinking to throw me off the track."

"What did you do?" Winnie asked, his curiosity excited.

"Pasted the letter-scraps together, and so got a clue to the party that had taken the documents I wanted."

"And you are after the party now?"

"Yes; I called at the house on my way up and found that the man was in town."

"Well, good luck to you; though between you and me, Frank, I should never have thought that you would believe in this South-western notion of personal vengeance."

"Neither do I," Texas replied, slowly, "but I own I have a strange curiosity to discover who it is that has taken so much pains to baffle my search. But where are you bound?"

"After Ozark," replied Winnie, with a side glance at Gol Adair, who seemed buried in abstraction. "I have telegraphed to General Smith, at Little Rock, for permission to take command of the detachment here and pursue this outlaw. You heard about the killing of the Dutch boy, Pete?" and as he put the question, Winnie sunk his voice almost to a whisper so that Adair should not hear him.

"Yes."

"Adair here loved that boy as if he had been his own son. He has hardly eaten anything since the night when we found Pete in the road, stone-dead, with Ozark's buck-shots in his brain. Ozark is gone up now, sure, for the old man is as well acquainted with the swamps as he is, and he'll run him night and day till he squares the account."

"There's my man!" exclaimed the overseer, suddenly, as Judge Yell rode down the street. "I'll see you again!" And then Texas spurred off to intercept the old Judge.

At nine o'clock that night the telegraph dispatch came from Little Rock, authorizing Winnie to take command of the detachment of soldiers whom the outlaw had so handsomely whipped, and at ten, Winnie and Gol Adair, with the five soldiers at their heels, were on their way to arrest the desperado.

At three o'clock on the next afternoon the detachment suddenly came upon the outlaw on the East road, a mile or so the other side of the county seat.

A fight ensued, the result of which was one soldier badly wounded, Ozark dismounted from his mule in hot haste by Gol Adair sending a rifle-ball "plum" through the brute, and forced to take refuge in the swamp by the side of the road, leaving his terrible double-barrel gun as trophy of victory to the conquerors.

"Leave him to me!" cried Gol Adair, as he swung himself out of the saddle, and, ramming down a charge into his rifle, prepared to follow the fugitive. "One is as good as twenty in this hyer slush. I'll fetch him!" and the old hunter dashed into the wilderness, leaving the soldiers to return and tell the story of their victory.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AT LAST!

TEXAS rode up to the Judge who was mounted on a mule.

"Good-evening, Judge, the overseer said.

"Ah, good-evening, Mr. Texas," the Judge remarked, bowing in his usual stately and dignified manner.

"I found a letter belonging to you out near my place." Texas drew the letter from his pocket as he spoke. He had matched the torn scraps together and pasted them on a thin piece of paper.

By the aid of the light which streamed from the window of the saloon near by the Judge examined the letter.

It was simply a note from Bob Howard requesting the Judge to call at his office when he came into town.

The Judge looked puzzled.

"I don't remember ever seeing this," he said, thoughtfully. "I got a verbal message of the same import as this from Howard the other day, but I am certain I never received this note."

"Then Howard must have lost it," Texas observed. "I have a strange curiosity to find out where it did come from. Much obliged, Judge; I'll go after Howard right away."

The overseer proceeded to ride off, and the Judge called out after him:

"You'll find Bob at the General Lee saloon."

Thither the overseer proceeded, and there, as the Judge had said, he found the young lawyer.

Howard remembered the note instantly.

"Oh, yes, I wrote that."

"And did you send it to the Judge?"

"Of course."

"Why, he told me just now that he never received it."

"The deuce he did!" exclaimed Howard, in astonishment.

"Yes; he seemed quite positive about it. He said, though, that he remembered receiving a verbal message from you upon the same subject."

"Oh, yes, I remember all about it now!" Howard ex-

claimed, abruptly. "After I wrote the note and got one of the young nigs to carry it, it suddenly occurred to me that the boy might lose it on the way, so I told him what the contents were. I see; the boy told the Judge I wanted to see him, and did not deliver the note at all."

The overseer began to despair; the clue seemed to be no clue at all.

"The boy probably put the note in his pocket," Howard continued, "and then threw it away sometime when he was out by your place. It was that young imp, Jim Crow."

And then a sudden light flashed upon the bewildered brain of the overseer.

Jim Crow was the grandson of old Uncle Snow! He had been asleep in the upper story of Snow's house on the night when the old negro had revealed where the box was concealed. What was more probable than that he had overheard the conversation, and had robbed the box of its contents?

"Much obliged, Mr. Howard," said the overseer, abruptly, and then he rode rapidly away, leaving Howard in a state of considerable astonishment.

Straight to the house of the old negro, Texas rode.

The door of the shanty was open and Texas rode up; he saw that both the old man and his grandson were within.

Springing from his horse the overseer strode abruptly into the cabin. Drawing a revolver from his belt, he cocked it and leveled the shining tube full at the head of the young black, who no sooner beheld the menace than he went down upon his knees in an agony of terror.

"You young whelp, tell me what you did with the paper that you stole from the tin box or I'll drill a hole through your black head!" the overseer cried, sternly.

"Don't shoot, massa!" howled the boy, in abject terror; "'fore de Lord, I'll done tell you all 'bout it!"

"Where is it?" And as Texas spoke he thrust the cold muzzle of the pistol against the boy's temple.

"Up-sta'rs, hid in de ruff," cried the boy, with a howl.

"Get it immediately!"

Jim Crow did not wait for a second command, but scrambled up the ladder in a dreadful hurry; in a moment he was back with a folded paper, yellow with age.

The boy, with the cunning of his race, had overheard the conversation between his grandfather and the white stranger relative to the box, as already recorded, and falling into the error that there was either money or jewels concealed in it, had stolen forth to possess himself of the treasure, but finding only a written paper in the box, he had taken possession of it—with what motive he could hardly have told himself, except that he thought it must be of value to *some one*, and that, at some future time, he might be able to dispose of it. Happening to have Howard's note in his pocket, he had torn it into pieces, and placed them in the box, thinking that one paper was as good as another. Then, with the natural desire to impress Fayette and Foxcroft with the belief that it was valuable to them, he had told of the hidden box, knowing, too, that it only contained a few worthless scraps of paper.

But the revolver of the overseer; and the abrupt accusation, had been too much for him, and in his fright he had yielded up his ill-gotten treasure.

The overseer put it at once into his pocket without examination.

"Uncle Snow, this young imp will stretch a rope one of these days if he isn't careful," Texas said, dryly; then he retreated from the house, mounted his horse and rode off toward the Smith plantation. And there, in the silence of his own room, he examined the yellow document that for so many years had been buried from the light.

An expression of profound astonishment appeared upon the face of the overseer as he ascertained the nature of the legal paper which was spread out on the little table before him.

"Well, of all the strange chances in the world!" he muttered, after he had carefully perused the paper. Then he turned it over and examined the back of it. Three short lines traced in a strange-colored ink, now almost faded out, and a signature beneath. Not one man out of a thousand would have guessed that the faint-hued ink was of human blood.

The signature was bold and strong.

"John Cooper, Captain, 3d Texas, C. S. A."

Three times, at least, the overseer read the almost illegible words over, and then he took up a pen and with a firm hand deliberately blotted out the faint lines.

"There," he murmured, after he had finished and he sat contemplating his work; "the secret is mine and his. It is not possible that he can guess or even suspect that any soul in the world except himself knows aught of the past."

Then the overseer got up, folded the paper carefully and put it in a secret pocket in the breast of his flannel undershirt.

Will Fayette had little idea of the impending blow.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"SOLID CHUNKS OF WISDOM."

DAY after day passed. The legal notice that the mortgage would be foreclosed had been given, and Smith had vainly endeavored to get enough money together to meet the demand. But everything went wrong. The insurance company upon whom he had depended, had become involved in more difficulties, and it was thought that it would be fully a year before their affairs would be settled so that they could declare a dividend.

The General fussed and worried, but Missouri seemed strangely contented, and the overseer would every now and then, in a placid manner, tell the General to take it easy and trust to some fortunate accident to see him through.

The Fayettees, father and son, had made up their minds to force payment. Missouri's refusal had produced the anticipated result.

Sitting in their office, they had discussed the affair in all its bearings, and the son had just observed that the plantation would go for a mere song, when Sheriff Johnson came in.

"Good-mornin'," Johnson said, as he stuck his head in at the door; "have you heerd the news?"

"What news?" Will Fayette asked, carelessly.

"'Bout Ginerel Smith."

"No; what about Smith?"

"Why, they're goin' fur to seize his plantation!"

This astounding intelligence brought young Fayette to his feet at once.

"Who's going to seize his plantation?" he asked, hardly able to believe his hearing.

"I don't know 'bout that," Johnson said, doubtfully; "some creditor, I reckon."

"Well, I think they will have some trouble to get over our mortgage," young Fayette remarked, incredulously.

"I don't know how that will work," Johnson observed, with an air of profound wisdom. "I heerd old Judge Yell say that the place was gwine up, for sure; an' I reckon what the Judge don't know 'bout the law ain't worth knowin'."

"Where is the Judge?" the elder Fayette asked.

"Over to Bob Howard's office."

"You had better go over and see what there is in this report," old Fayette said, addressing his son.

Fayette seized his hat and departed at once, while the sheriff proceeded to carry the startling intelligence to other quarters.

Fayette found the old Judge busily engaged in writing in Howard's office.

"Good-morning, Judge. What is this report about some one seizing General Smith's place?" Fayette questioned, abruptly.

"Good-morning, Mr. Fayette," returned the old Judge, blandly. "The report is quite correct. I am retained for the plaintiff."

"But, Judge, you must be aware that my father and myself hold a mortgage on the place. You can't get over that!" Fayette exclaimed, just a little hotly.

"My dear sir, we don't propose to get over it," replied the Judge, caressing his double chin with his fat, white hand, and smiling beamingly upon Fayette. "It is for your mortgage to get over our bill of sale."

"A bill of sale given before our mortgage?" exclaimed Fayette, in astonishment and alarm.

"Exactly; we propose to turn General Smith out; we have nothing to do with your mortgage at all; you can't hold my client, Mr. Francis Cooper, nor his property, for any act of General Smith. In fact, to speak quite plainly, Mr. Fayette, as far as the plantation of Piney-wood is concerned, your mortgage isn't worth the paper it is written on."

"Judge, if it is not asking too much, I should like to know what claim this Francis Cooper has on General Smith's plantation?"

"Certainly," the old Judge replied, with extreme dignity.

"I shall be pleased to give you all the information in my power. The fact is, Mr. Fayette, our case is so strong that we can afford to be very frank in regard to it. I have sent to General Smith a full statement of the whole affair, and I expect him in town every minute. Between us, Mr. Fayette, General Smith will not contest the case, but will give us peaceable possession; I am sure of it, because he hasn't got a leg to stand on, legally. Here is the document on which we base our claim."

Judge Yell unfolded a paper, yellow with age, and held it up for Fayette's inspection.

It was a regular bill of sale of Smith's entire plantation to John Cooper, of San Antonio, Texas, for the sum of ten thousand dollars, dated 10th of May, 1863.

"You will observe that is witnessed by Captain Kenford and Major Crockett, both of whom are now living near Little Rock, and can be brought forward to testify regarding it; besides, General Smith will not attempt to deny his signature," Yell said.

Fayette was like a man stunned by this overwhelming testimony.

"But this deed is to John Cooper!" he said, slowly.

"Quite correct," remarked the old lawyer; "Captain John Cooper, of the Third Texas regiment, died here at Smithville a short time after he received this deed. His son, Francis Cooper, now claims it, as his father's heir. There might be a little doubtful point there, the identity of the said Francis Cooper; but, luckily, Lieutenant Winnie, now here, was acquainted with both father and son, and can testify as to that. You see, Mr. Fayette, how strong the case is. By the way, you must know Mr. Cooper. He's now acting as General Smith's overseer—Francis Texas; Texas is his middle name."

And then, as the old lawyer folded up the yellow paper, Fayette caught sight of the blotted lines upon the back. In an instant the truth flashed upon him.

This was the paper that had been concealed in the tin tobacco-box!

The overseer was not the son of the Texan drover. Conscience, "which doth make cowards of us all," had tricked both Fayette and the outlaw into the belief that it was for them the avenger searched; and now, lo and behold! they had only yielded to a phantom fear.

Fayette sat and pondered over the situation for a few minutes in silence.

"It seems, then, that General Smith has really had no legal claim to his plantation since sixty-three," he said, at length.

"That deduction is quite correct," Judge Yell replied. "By a series of peculiar accidents, this deed has been kept back, but that does not impair the legality of it. We are prepared to prove, by the witnesses, whose signatures are attached to this document, that the sale was *bona fide*, and the consideration given and received. Of course you are aware that the law does not hold that a deed must be recorded, although for safety it is generally done."

"It is very strange that General Smith has kept the existence of this deed a secret, and used the estate precisely as if it had not existed," Fayette observed, with an angry look upon his face.

"My dear Mr. Fayette, I can assure you that my honored friend, General Smith, had no knowledge of the existence of this legal document," and the old lawyer laid particular stress upon the "honored friend." "I feel perfectly sure, Mr. Fayette, that you would be the last person in the world to suggest that General Leonidas W. Smith, the sole descendant of the illustrious Smith, who from the howling wilderness reclaimed the broad acres of our infant metropolis here, would perform any act that a high-toned gentleman would call in question. Bring the case home to yourself, Mr. Fayette. From the force of circumstances, General Smith parted with his ancestral acres; then went forth to battle with the Northern invaders. Returning from the gory fields of war, like the Roman of old, prepared to transform the weapon of carnage into the peaceful implement of agriculture, he found that all the world still considered him the owner of Pineywood; that Captain John Cooper and the deed of sixty-three were *non est inventus*! Captain Cooper had never taken any steps to establish his claim to the estate. The chances were that the deed was destroyed. There was no claimant for the property; General Smith was not bound by any law, human or divine, to make known the fact of the sale. It was his right to go on, and do with the estate as he liked, provided that neither Captain John Cooper nor his heir or heirs came forward to dispute his possession. You will understand,

Mr. Fayette, that not once in a hundred years is it possible that a deed of this sort could be brought forward after the death of the grantee, and a strong legal claim set up to oust the holder. But in this case, we are prepared to prove everything; the sale, the death of Mr. Cooper, the identity of the heir, and the genuineness of the deed."

"The only thing left for us is to bring an action against Smith to recover," Fayette said, moodily, "although I think that we can trouble your client's claim if we choose to contest it."

"Doubtful, unless you can prove collusion between General Smith and Captain Cooper in regard to the deed of sale; but, as we can establish that Captain Cooper died immediately after receiving the deed, and that by a chapter of accidents, it has been kept from the hands of his heir until now, and that the moment it came into the possession of said heir, he commenced legal proceedings immediately, to oust Smith, you see how extremely desperate that course of action would be. You will perceive that I speak with extreme frankness. I am too old a lawyer not to know the folly of unnecessary litigation."

"The only course left for us, then, is to sue Smith, and seize the stock, tools, etc.," Fayette said, slowly.

"You can't do that, very well," the Judge remarked, smiling as blandly as usual.

"Why not?" demanded Fayette, in extreme ill-temper; "this deed doesn't cover the stock and tools, does it?"

"No, but we have a certain claim for back rent since sixty-three, and as I had an idea that some creditor of Smith might have recourse upon the stock, etc., I took advantage of the General's openly expressed intention to emigrate, to get out a writ of *ne exeat* and attach all his valuables upon oath that he was about to fly from the State with intent to defraud his creditors. And, Mr. Fayette, if you can find five dollars' worth of property belonging to General Smith that my attachments don't cover, I will be willing to acknowledge that I don't know as much about the law as I think I do."

And then the old Judge laid back in the arm-chair, caressed his chin and smiled beamingly upon Fayette.

That gentleman rose in a rage. He was fully conscious that he was no match for the old Judge.

"We shall fight the affair, Judge," he exclaimed. "I shall see Mr. Howard at once and instruct him to take the necessary steps."

"You can't get Bob Howard," the Judge said; "he's retained on our side."

"Then I shall take Colonel Chase."

"Nor Colonel Chase, either; nor lawyer Warner; nor any other lawyer short of Fort Smith or Little Rock. I've retained every legal gentleman in Franklin county on my side," the Judge said, quietly. "If you really want a lawsuit we are prepared to give it to you, red-hot, to use that common but forcible expression."

Fayette looked at the Judge in disgust, but with an effort he curbed down the rage that was swelling in his heart.

"Judge, I don't want to act hastily in this matter," he said, slowly, "but four thousand dollars and upwards is no joke to lose. Does your client propose to make any arrangement with regard to the mortgage?"

"Mr. Fayette, now you are uttering solid chocks of wisdom," said the Judge. "My client does propose to help you out of the difficulty. He fully understands that for you to proceed against General Smith, as he is situated at present, would be only to exemplify the trite adage so familiar to the disciples of Coke and Blackstone, of 'suing a beggar and catching'—the insect whose name is not to be mentioned to ears polite. But, to come directly to business: On condition of your father and yourself relinquishing all claim upon General Smith, Mr. Francis Cooper will draw you three notes for one thousand dollars apiece, payable in three, six and nine months, bearing ten per cent interest."

"That puts us in for over a thousand dollars," Fayette remarked, thoughtfully, pondering over the matter.

"Well, count the cost of a law-suit with an almost certainty that you will be beaten in the end," the Judge said, a very placid and contented expression upon his face.

"I will see my father and talk the matter over with him," Fayette observed, as he advanced to the door.

"Do so; give my respects to him by the way," Yell said, returning to his writing.

The two Fayettes discussed the matter. The Judge's statements produced the proper impression, and the result was that the overseer's offer was accepted and Smith breathed free again.

CHAPTER XLV.

SMITH ACKNOWLEDGES THE CORN.

To Missouri's astonishment she noticed that a very strange coldness seemed to have appeared in her father's manner toward the overseer, since that gentleman had announced who and what he was.

Through Judge Yell, Texas had communicated to the General his desire that he—the General—and his daughter should consider the plantation as their home, and hinted that, at some future day, an arrangement might be made in regard to running the place on shares, as he—the overseer—professed his inability to handle the place alone.

But the General, though affected almost to tears by the offer, and the thought of how The Man-from-Texas had lifted all his liabilities and taken them upon his own shoulders, shook his head sadly, wrung the old Judge's hand impressively, remarked, with extreme earnestness, that he wished he was in heaven or the other place, and stalked away; but he gave no sign of the manner in which he regarded the overseer's offer.

Three days had passed since the necessary legal settlement had been made, and during that time the General had seemed to avoid the company of the overseer as much as possible. Texas, though, never seemed to notice it, and attended to the duties appertaining to the plantation as usual.

On the evening of the third day, just before supper, the overseer was in the store-house, taking account of the stock of feed on hand, when General Smith, gloomy and melancholy, stalked into the cabin and carelessly closed the door behind him. The overseer figuring away by the light of a tallow candle, looked up in astonishment.

"Mr. Cooper, I can't stand this any longer!" exclaimed the General abruptly.

"Can't stand what, General?" asked the overseer.

"I can't stay here under the roof that belongs to you, sir, and eat your bread, with this dreadful secret preying upon my brain; I shall go mad, sir! I feel that my brain is giving way, and I am such a poor, miserable coward, sir, that I have feared to come to you and make the confession which I ought to make. The first morsel of your bread, sir, which I put into my mouth ought to have choked me, but, there doesn't seem to be such a thing as justice on this earth. Every night since I knew who you really was, I have prayed that Heaven might call me to a reckoning before the morning came, but each morning I have awoke as well in health as ever, although sorely distracted in mind. Francis Cooper, instead of coming forward like a guardian angel and saving me and my child from being turned into the world like the beggars that we are, you ought to take your revolver, sir, and lodge the contents in my guilty heart. But, sir, I can not bear the load any longer, and I have come to make a full confession."

The overseer listened very attentively to the trembling accents of the old soldier, but the moment he had finished, spoke:

"General Smith, I know all about it," he said, quietly; "and all I ask is for you to tell me the particulars. Did my father fall in a duel?"

"Yes; shot dead by my hand!" exclaimed the General, excitedly. "We had been gambling heavily together for a week or so; the night before we met I had lost to him at the card-table almost every thing that I had in the world. Had even sold this plantation to him, that I might have money to stake. We quarreled over the cards; from words we came to blows; after that, as men whose honor was at stake, a duel was the only issue. We arranged to fight without seconds; we met in the morning, and at the first fire he fell. I ran to his side, but he was apparently dead. I hurried at once for assistance, but, when I returned, the body had disappeared. Now, Mr. Cooper, I am at your mercy. I know that I owe you satisfaction, for blood demands blood. I know that I speak like a coward when I say that I can not raise my hand against a man who has acted so nobly as you have, but I am willing to stand and receive your fire—or, if you will but say the word, I will put the muzzle of your revolver to my head and pull the trigger with my own hand."

"General Smith, though a Southern man, I don't believe in the 'code of honor,' nor in the doctrine of blood for blood," Texas said, slowly. "My father fell by your hand, in fair fight; it is not for me to seek your blood, but I will make one demand; I will speak like the Spanish daughter who claimed vengeance of Cid; 'he has slain my father, let him take me for wife and so replace him.' Give me Missouri!"

Little need to state the answer of the General; who could fail to guess it?

The Man-from-Texas won the black-eyed beauty—and pretty Missouri soon became Mrs. Francis Cooper.

After Yell Ozark's disappearance in the swamp, with "Gol, the Swapper," in full chase, nothing more was heard of him, until, about a week later, some negroes, after 'coon on a moonlight night by the borders of Black-Jack Swamp, came upon the body of the outlaw, extended at full length on the ground close by a tall cottonwood. The hand of the desperado lay upon a revolver, showing that he died like a wild-cat at bay. A single bullet-hole through the head betrayed the course of the ball of Gol Adair, who had tracked the outlaw by day and by night, until at last, hunted down, Ozark had turned and given battle.

In due course of time Winnie married the negro school-teacher and carried her off to his Northern home.

After Ozark's death Congo disappeared. Warned by the fate of the outlaw, the giant black sought the more congenial scenes of the frontier.

Foxcroft and Fayette still flourish in Smithville. The fat store-keeper looks aspiringly to a seat in the legislature, while Fayette has his eye on Congress; but, as old Judge Yell has signified his intention of running as an independent candidate, the chances are that there will not only be some fun in the canvass, but that the fat Judge will win the race.

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